

August 2020

Issue 30

THE SPECTRUM SHOW

Magazine

SWORD OF IANNA

AN EPIC GAME

V-DRIVE

THE MODERN MICRODRIVE

PLUS:

DK CENTIPEDE MYSTERY
COLOUR CLASH
AND MORE...



Includes material not in
the show

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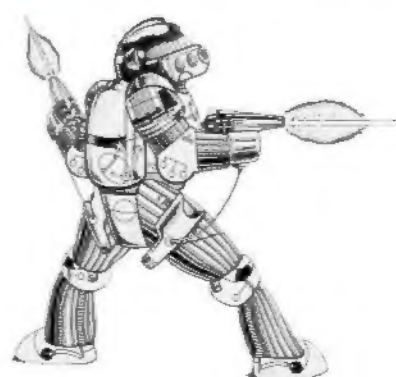
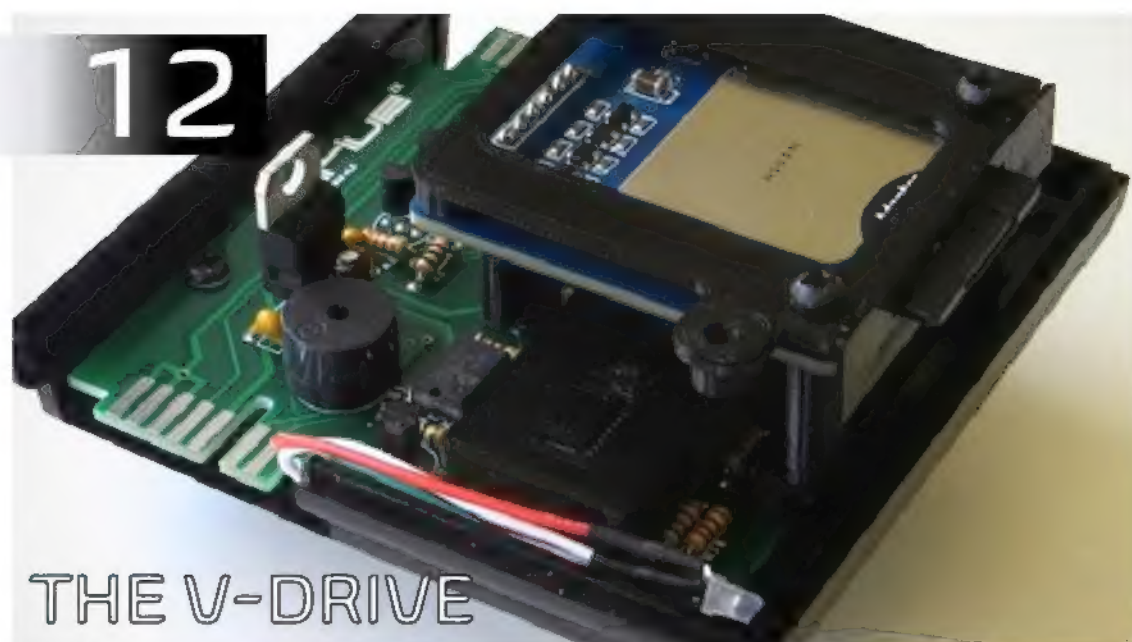
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EDITORIAL



Welcome to issue 30 of The Spectrum Show Magazine. Thank you for downloading and reading.

What a crazy few months this has been, not only for the UK, but also the World. I hope everyone prevailed well and that we can soon get back to some kind of normality. It may be a long slow journey though.

The main highlight for me, although not directly Spectrum related, was my long-awaited house move finally happened. This meant a few weeks away from the computer packing, moving, unpacking and generally getting into our new home.

The new office also had to be setup and I had to wait three weeks before I could get any kind of broadband connection. Now the office is almost complete and broadband installed. I can, at last, get on with the show and this magazine.



sat on top of my VTX5000 modem along side three Microdrives.

Using Micron software, I sat there night after night waiting for a call and having to manually put the modem online so users could connect. Luckily it was only online from 6pm to 10pm, but I still got calls in the middle of the night!

The BBS files are now sadly lost. They were all on Microdrive and were sold along with my computer and games many years later.

Onto Spectrum things then..

The V-Drive gets a good review in this issue, and it is one of the things I was looking to purchase myself and review on the show. I still may do this at some point so it was good to see someone else's perspective on it.

I really like the idea of using an old (broken) Microdrive case to house a modern mass storage device. I was hoping someone would fit a divIDE into one at some point, but the V-Drive offers full compatibility with Microdrives at the expense of requiring Interface One and using .MDR files.

New games seem to be getting more and more impressive lately, with Sword of Ianna being an excellent example. I know it's not brand new and was released a few years ago, but it is technically stunning. It is great to see this constant flow of new games arriving for the machine, and it's a little sad that I don't have time to write my own at the moment.

Having said that, I have a few older titles that need finishing, one updated title of a text adventure and one brand new game I threw together to test out the new AGDmini engine.

AGD continues to be improved and AGDmini is an offshoot of that, using 8x8 sprites. Games created using it have a charm of their own and also enable you to remove some restrictions compared to the original AGD. For example you are no longer limited to eight sprites on screen at once, I am told AGDmini can have up to 30.

A great tool that continues to provide Spectrum users with the means to produce commercial quality games.



Before the move I filmed and recorded audio for a lot of reviews and features, preparing for the time away, so hopefully I can stitch it all together for the next episode.

While packing and unpacking the numerous boxes I did discover a few things I never knew I had. A magazine I had never heard of from 1982, some games I don't recall ever owning and some pictures of my old bedroom during the 12 months I ran my Spectrum Bulletin Board.

Those pictures were a real trip down memory lane. I had my Spectrum inside a Saga keyboard

Some of the content made it onto my next BBS, Image Viewdata. This ran on my Amiga A500 and could luckily run unattended. Again, all the files to that system are lost as well.

When I think of things I threw out or sold over the years, it makes me a little sad. I sold my entire (large) spectrum collection around 1986 or 1987 to buy an Amiga. Later, around 1990 I amassed another fine collection which was left in five or six bin bags when I moved house.



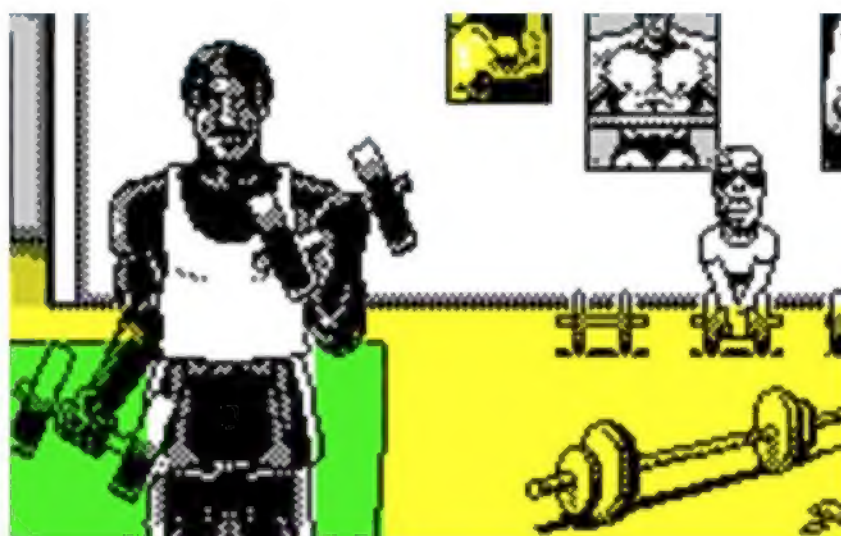
OLYMPIC DREAM

Ocean Software are using their old Daley Thompson licence, and are planning to release a game to coincide with the Seoul Olympic Games. The great British athlete has certainly been earning the software house money over the last few years.

With the working title of Daley Thompson 88, the game will come with a lot of extras in the box, and even though the Spectrum version is only 33% complete, Ocean are making big claims about it.

You will get to play Daley in all ten events of the decathlon but also take part in training events that will affect your performance once on the track. The game seems to be an upgrade from the first title, with added training and hopefully improved graphics and sound, now the 128 machines are here.

The game is set to be released in August.



UNCLE SAM

There are rumours that a new Spectrum is heading our way soon, but not from Sinclair or Amstrad. This one is a clone and will be produced by Miles Gordon Technologies, the people who brought us the +D and Disciple disk interfaces.

The machine is rumoured to have improved features such as graphics and storage, and will be much faster. The best news though, is it will be able to play Spectrum games as well as titles specially written for the new features. These are just rumours of course so the end machine, if it gets completed, may be totally different.

BATTERY POWER

Imagine a cross between the Sinclair C5 and the Citroen 2CV – well soon you won't have to because Clive Sinclair and Citroen are rumoured to be in talks to merge the two vehicles.

The Citroen 2CV5, as it may be called, is hoped to provide a family sized car using the shell of the 2CV coupled with the battery technology of the C5.

A brave idea that was well ahead of its time.

KEMPSTON WIMP

Kempston has released a WIMP system. That, in case you didn't know, stands for windows, icons, menus and pointers, for their mouse. The software will allow you to make your Speccy, when equipped with a mouse, look just like an Atari ST. The software will include a series of machine code routines to be used from BASIC, so you can even make your own system.

The software, which is currently missing in action, will cost £9.95.

ARCADE FLOOD

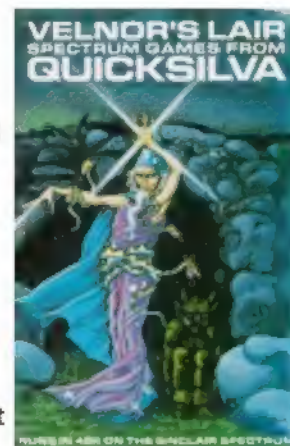
With the flood of recent arcade conversions to the Spectrum, Activision has announced it has just acquired two quality licenses.

Firstly Afterburner, the excellent 3D arcade shooter will somehow be converted, hopefully before Christmas alongside R-Type – a brilliant horizontal shooter. Both of these games will require some top quality programming, and Activision say they are confident this can be achieved.

BUDGET DEREK

Derek Brewster, the man well known to many Spectrum fans as having written early games like Velnor's Lair, Star Clash, Kentilla and the Codenamed Mat games, has set up his own budget label called Zepelin Games.

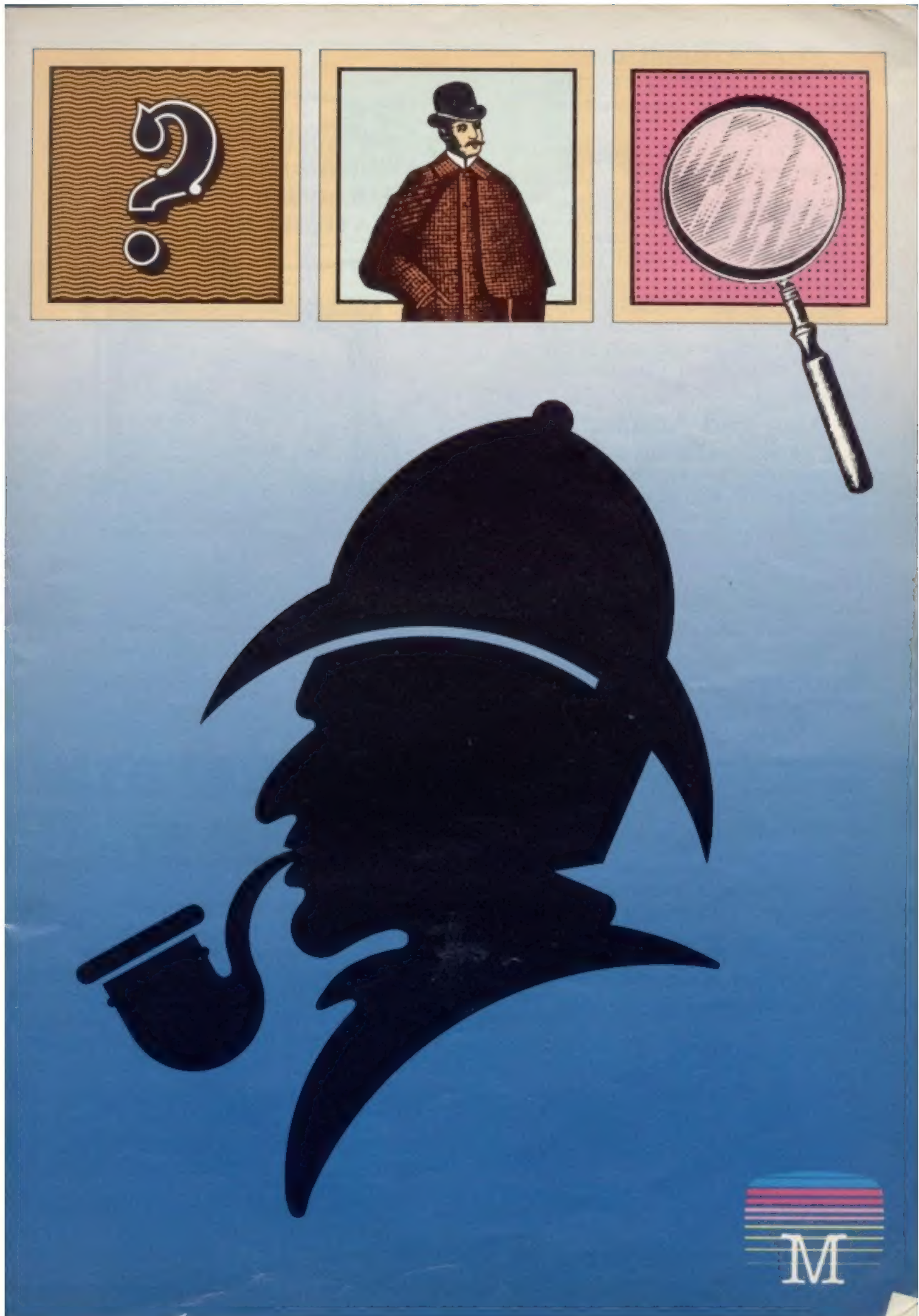
Their first game releases are due very soon with two new games, Sabotage and Frontline. The new label will also release older titles, such as Derek's games at budget prices.



AWARDS

US Gold have picked up several honours at this year's Computer & Video Games awards. They were voted best software house, and their game Out Run was voted game of the year and best arcade game of the year.

Best original game was won by Nebulus from Hewson Consultants and adventure game of the year went to Guild of Thieves from Magnetic Scrolls.



the SWORD of LANA

RetroWorks 2017

A long time ago, the World was ruled by the Lord of Chaos. The Goddess of Ianna chose Tukaram to carry the sacred sword that could defeat this evil. Tukaram brought peace to the lands and his lineage was blessed Servants of the Goddess.

But Evil never rests and centuries later, it rose again.

As heir of Tukaram, it is your duty to go and defeat Chaos and restore order once more.

That is the story that sets the scene well, and this new game from Retroworks is superb in all aspects.

Before the game, there is an impressive intro with great music, and then you are taken in the game world. The main character is wonderfully animated, with many moves and actions all drawn excellently. The atmosphere generated by this and the background graphics really drag you in and make for an engrossing game.

Your first task is to find the fortress of Kashgar and so you set off to explore the wonderfully drawn world. The dark blue backdrop looks foreboding and great challenges lie ahead. You can walk, run, jump, crouch, get your sword and fight. You can also do a long jump, something needed to get across wider gaps.

As you explore you find you can grab platforms above you and clamber up as well as kill the various creatures. You can also pull levers that open up new areas of the map to explore and continue the quest.

Keep an eye on your health though, and collect food when needed. The bottom panel also shows your enemy's strength, which is a good way to see if you are inflicting damage.

The pace suits the game as you walk about the landscape and if you feel the need for speed, you can always run. This however, tends to lead to death. Unseen drops await on





some screens, and the flip screen mechanism gives you no way to see these impending dangers.

If you find an enemy you can whack them with your sword and you can also break down walls to discover items such as food.

The first puzzle involves two levers once pulled an exit opens up.

The game is huge and full of excellently drawn scenery and sprites. Control is well thought out and very nicely implemented, and everything sits together professionally. It will take you a while to get through this. The RZX playback takes over two and half hours to get through to the end, a mammoth undertaking, but definitely worth the effort if you enjoy this type of game.

The music is excellent and changes as you enter each area and really sets the atmosphere well.

This is a brilliant game.. Well presented and easy to play, but will provide a great challenge.

Highly recommended...





PSS - 1984



You are the last survivor of Xavior, and you have to save your race from extinction. To do this you have to collect DNA segments that for some reason have been left scattered about in huge underground complex.

The complex is, as you would expect, inhabited by nasty things, all guarding this DNA.

The game boasts 4096 rooms and 256 different enemies but once you play you'll notice the rooms are almost identical. They are the same shape with door in the same place, and if you can get far enough, the walls change to make it look different. There is no variety, they are all square with doors at one of the main compass points.

Onto the game then and it's a maze game with one obvious difference, the main sprite is huge. This though causes problems when playing. To move from room to room, orbs have to be collected, and this is tricky because of the amount of sprites on screen and the size of your character.

You find yourself rushing to the door before the enemies have fully materialised to avoid colliding with them and then grabbing an orb as quickly as possible.

The graphics are large but the main sprite does have a weird walking animation. It is almost comical and because of the size, it is even more

obvious.

The other smaller sprites are animated too and everything moves smoothly in the cramped space. The enemies do change for each room and there is a good variety of them, but you can't really stop to look at them.

The game's only challenge is to avoid the nasties. You can shoot them, but the space is so limited it can be difficult. One touch from them and you're dead. It would have been better to have a health counter rather than instant death.

The sound is limited to just a few effects, and a terrible tune on the intro screen.

Control is crisp, but again, with the space limitations, this proves useless really.

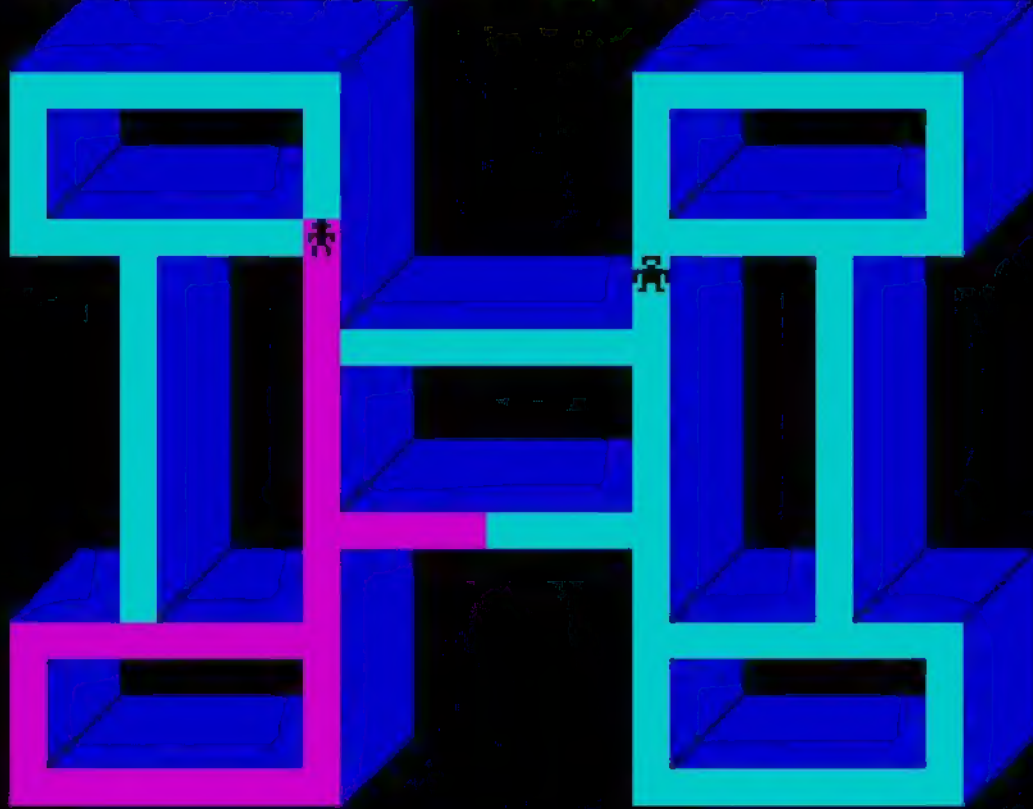
This is a frustrating game. You just can't make any progress at all and the rooms all look the same so there is no real sense of going anywhere.

Making the main sprite smaller, or having less enemies in each room would have helped, so would having different shaped rooms, but as it is, it's one to avoid.

3D PAINTER

CDS Microsystems 1983

SCORE 000190 012430 HIGH 000295



I think we all know what to expect here, most games, even type-ins that bear the name 'Painter' means moving around a fixed maze changing the colour of the floor. CDS though have given us this version in 3D. Obviously a selling point back in the early days as 3D was somewhat of a novelty. 3D however, can mean a multitude of things.

As you can see, the 3D for this game is produced by simply adding a 45 degree angle to the players path and extruding it back. It's effective, but not the hardest thing to produce on the Spectrum. The 3D also does not change the basic game-play, it's just a graphic look.

The game remains the same though and involves moving your tiny, UDG man around a fixed path in character jumps. As you move to a new character square the colour changes and when all of the path has been changed, a new level begins.

Non-animated graphics and standard Beeper sounds are the order of the day here and there is nothing in this game that wasn't available as a type-in.

The control is sometimes sticky, meaning you fail to go down a pathway and either overshoot or stop one square too soon. This allows the chasing enemy, a fatter stick man, to catch you.

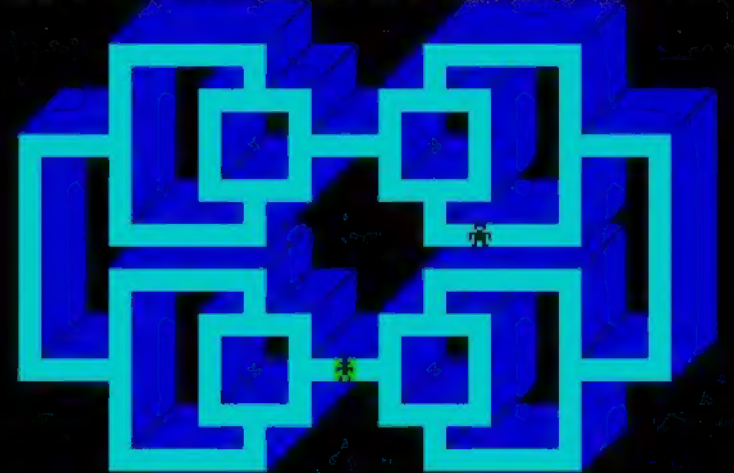
There are 4 different levels with different layouts but can you play it for that long?

Games like this were often found in magazines, but the 3D name made it stand out.

A below average game then, even for 1983.



SCORE 001829 1291 HIGH 000735



SCORE 004012 1277 HIGH 000735



SQIJ!

Tardis Remakes 2018

Anyone who is a fan of the Spectrum or has been around the Spectrum scene for a while, will know there are certain games that are totally rubbish. The top contender is Sqij – released by Power House (the budget label of CRL).

Sqij has an interesting story. It was originally released for the C64 in 1986. It also received an official port for the ZX Spectrum in 1987, but that version has famously been called “the worst Spectrum game ever”, so Tardis Remakes took on the task of doing a proper version in 2018.

You play as Sqij, a bird tasked with collecting the lost pieces of a tree and bringing them to a holy cave where it can grow. The caverns are full of nasties you’ll have to dispose of, and you’ll also have to find keys to unlock barriers that block parts of the caves.

At its heart it is a maze game, but the background and remake make it much more interesting.

This game is very close to the original release on the C64, which was a far better, if more difficult game. Sqij has some great graphics that really look like the c64 version, and everything moves well. The walls are all the same colour, but this mimics the original.

Sound is used to good effect with a variety of different noises for shooting, collisions and collections.

Control is crisp making for a great game and it’s certainly more playable than both the C64 original and the terrible CRL attempt.



The Story Of Sqij

The original Commodore 64 version was written by 13 year-old Jason Kendall in 1987. It was his first game and it was quickly snapped up by Budget Label, Power House (part of the CRL group). They paid him just £300 for it, and promptly put it out on their label.

A Commodore 16 version was also created in 1987 by Mark McCubbin, and although the same basic game, a few elements had to be reduced due to machine restrictions.

Now Power House wanted a version for the Spectrum, but Jason was not interested, instead they turned to another young coder, Jason Creighton. Power House (CRL) under Ashley Hildebrandt said they would provide him with the C64 version to work from, but, in typical CRL style, lied and didn't send it.

Jason arrived at the CRL offices to try and obtain a copy so he could start, but was met by criticism, and he was even blamed for the game not being released on time.

Eventually he got the Commodore version on disc – but he didn't have a disc drive, so all he had to work from was a map and brief viewing while at the CRL offices. Not only that, but CRL demanded he complete the game in one month.

Given that deadline and the atrocious behaviour of CRL, Jason decided not to make the slick machine code version he had planned and instead turned to Laser Basic. This was a set of extensions to Sinclair BASIC that provided things like sprites and sound routines.

The game was duly complete and handed over to Power House for

publication. The shambles of a company didn't even test it, they simply sent it for duplication and publication.

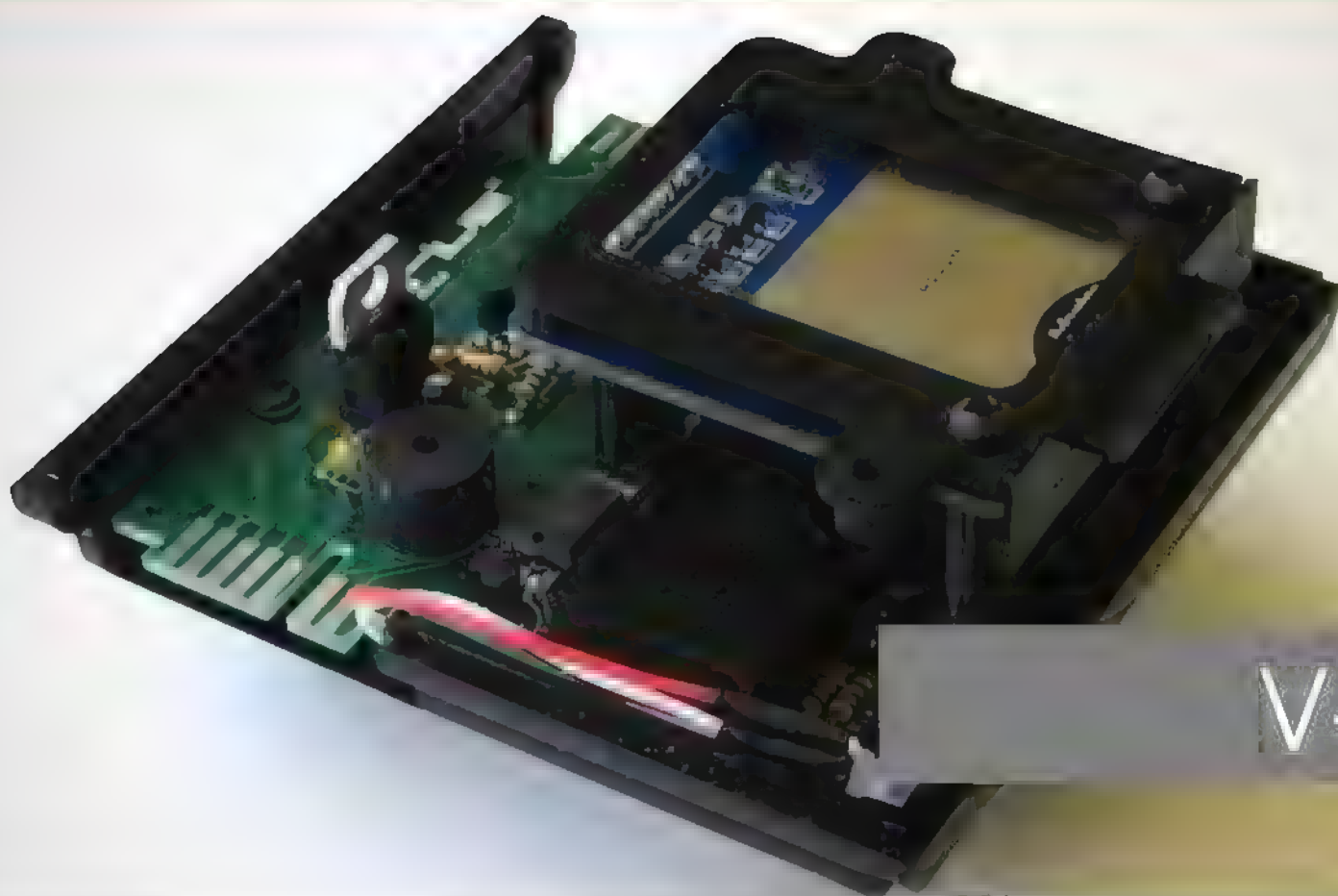
It wasn't long though that the game playing public found the game completely unplayable. It was not ridiculously hard or unfair, it was not a bug, or at least an intentional one, the game just could not be played at all. It didn't respond to key presses, so the game was, literally, unplayable.

The huge, badly drawn sprite just sat there on screen doing nothing. The cause of this problem was a POKE in the loader that enabled CAPS lock. Jason denies putting it there, but this was causing the problem. The game code checks for lowercase keys, so obviously did not respond.

The game can actually be played if you reverse this POKE, but this then causes more problems, as the game is then so bad that it is unplayable. Laser Basic's collision works strangely and so the overly large sprite often is immune or dies for no reason. Navigating around the caves causes instant crashes, as the rooms simply do not exist, and movement is so slow and cumbersome, it's difficult to see how Power House would have even accepted this for publication.

The game now has gone down in history for the wrong reasons, and it is a monument to greedy and incompetent software houses.





V-DRIVE

WILL WOODVINE EXPLORES THE MODERN MICRODRIVE

Sinclair launched the ZX Microdrive in July 1983. True to Sinclair's philosophy of miniaturisation and low-cost, it promised a cheap, high-speed storage system using miniature tape cartridges. Unfortunately the Microdrive didn't take off as well as Sinclair hoped, dogged by unreliability and also the high cost of the tape cartridges.

The Microdrive (and accompanying ZX Interface 1) are sought after in the current Sinclair retro-scene, be it by completist collectors, those who used it back in the day or those who wanted one and never had the chance to own one. With the arrival of the vDriveZX, there is now the opportunity to own a new Microdrive that doesn't rely on the vagaries of ageing tape cartridges.

The vDriveZX is a new device which is capable of emulating the ZX Microdrive – it provides one or more virtual drives, hence the name. It also provides the software tools to manage these virtual drives and tape cartridge images, in .mdr format, from the ZX Spectrum itself. The information related to the virtual drives and cartridge images are stored on SD card.

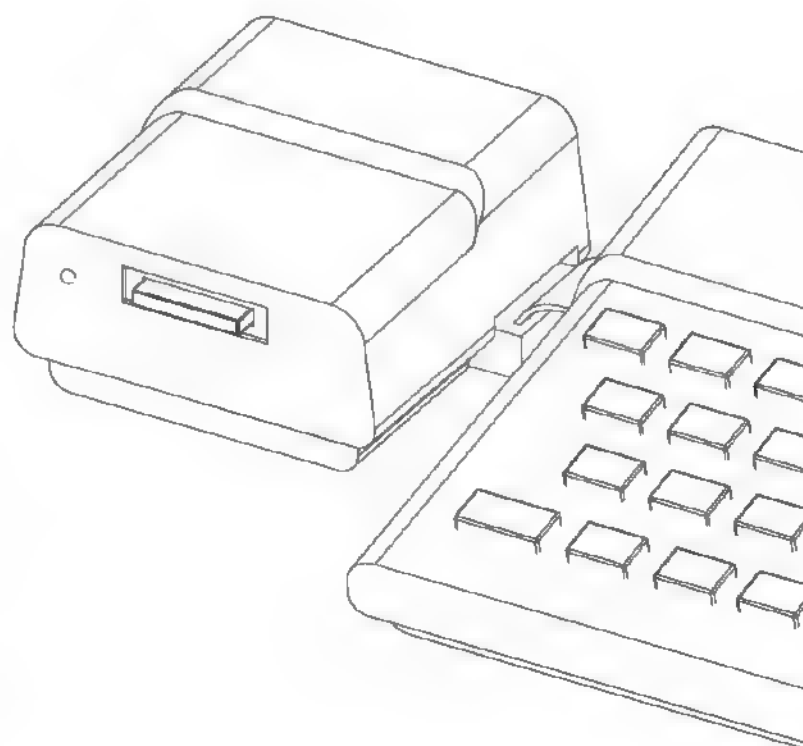
Housed in an existing Microdrive housing the vDriveZX can be connected to the ZX Spec-

trum via the ZX Interface 1. An excellent manual is provided with the vDriveZX clearly explaining the principles, operation and use of the vDriveZX. Also covered, and showing that the vDriveZX is likely to gain further features in the future, is how to easily upgrade the firmware. This is literally a case of having the new software on the SD card in the vDriveZX and typing .UPDATE – a considerable improvement over the process used during testing!

Up to eight Microdrives can be emulated, each with a different cartridge image. Using the software toolkit provided with the vDriveZX, additional virtual drives can be easily added or removed to suit. In addition to this the toolkit provides Bank commands which in simple terms load a previously saved set of images to the virtual drive. An example is that you could have four drives setup as word processor, current documents, archive documents and an empty drive, but by using the Bank commands, you can instantly switch to four drives, each with a game on, ready to

play. Further toolkit commands provide for directory control, deletion and renaming.

In use the vDriveZX is pretty much indistinguishable from using a "real" ZX Microdrive as it uses the existing commands used for the ZX Microdrive in Sinclair BASIC. The main differences are the lack of noise from the motor, as it is no longer present, and faster access times as the correct file no longer needs to be found on a physical cart. When loading a file from





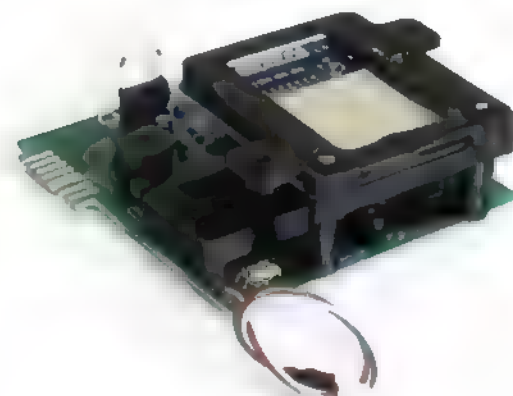
When it comes to compatibility, the vDriveZX has been tested and works with the 16/48k Spectrum, Spectrum +, Spectrum 128k (toastrack) and Spectrum 128k +2. A version of the vDriveZX is also being released for the Sinclair QL.

The vDriveZX is an excellent addition to the growing range of modern peripherals available for the ZX Spectrum, providing the ZX Microdrive experience without the need to worry about re-felting cartridges or the potential of a jammed tape cartridge. If you want to try the ZX Microdrive then the vDriveZX is the modern way to do it.

vDriveZX, you now get a change in the activity LED and a short beep from the vDriveZX, which can be turned off. Creating a new, empty cartridge image can prove a shock to seasoned ZX Microdrive owners, used to perhaps 90KB of cartridge capacity on a good day – the images created on the vDriveZX format to 127KB! (or 126KB, it does depend on the ROM version in your ZX Interface 1)

The vDriveZX works quite happily alongside real ZX Microdrives. Depending on how many virtual drives you have created on the vDriveZX, the physical Microdrive takes the

next logical position along. It was quite easy to copy from real microdrive cartridge to virtual image. Once done, the SD card can be removed and the .mdr image created can be stored on a PC and used with the many emulators available. It is this particular function that may also be of interest to those preserving microdrive software. The reverse is also quite true as it was very easy to copy a .mdr image onto a real cartridge. A Multiface 1 was also used to create a "backup" of a game to an image on the vDriveZX, something that the Multiface was created for 33 years ago.



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BRUCE LEE™

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Guide Bruce Lee to discover Immortality by beating the evil wizard and his minions.

That is the extent of the story behind this excellent platform game. A game that many Spectrum fans love and a game that, with a bit of practice, is fairly easy to complete.

Our hero has many moves including punching, kicking, climbing, jumping and crouching, and they are all needed if you want to complete this game.

The initial task seems simple; collect all the blue lamps. However there are two constantly chasing enemies to deal with. These are the Green Yamo, a rather fat martial arts expert and the Ninja. Both can be killed with a few kicks, but soon reappear and give chase. They can also be coaxed into falling down holes and running over exploding ground mines.

The screen layout are well designed and this flick-screen game has many hidden areas that are not visible until you have collected all of the lanterns first. Sometimes walls disappear, sometimes floors, leading to new areas with new challenges.

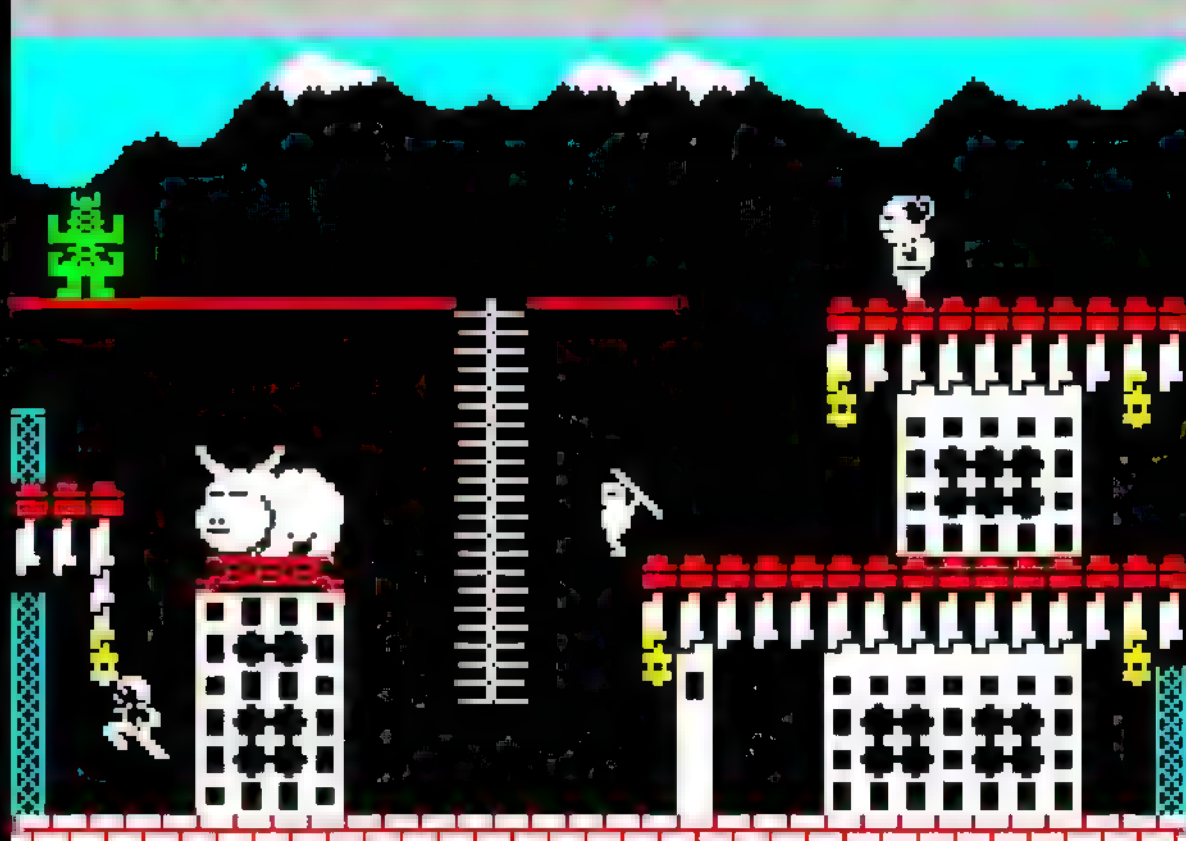
The initial set of screens are simple, with a few ladders and jumps. There is little in the way of danger until you venture further. As the game progresses, there are swords, flying objects and killer bugs to contend with. There are moving floors and waterfalls to climb, and even ropes on the roof to clamber across.

The graphics are great, with nicely detailed rooms and good animation on the sprites. The puzzles are logical and gameplay is excellent. Sound is a bit limited with footsteps, punches and a sound when a lantern is collected.

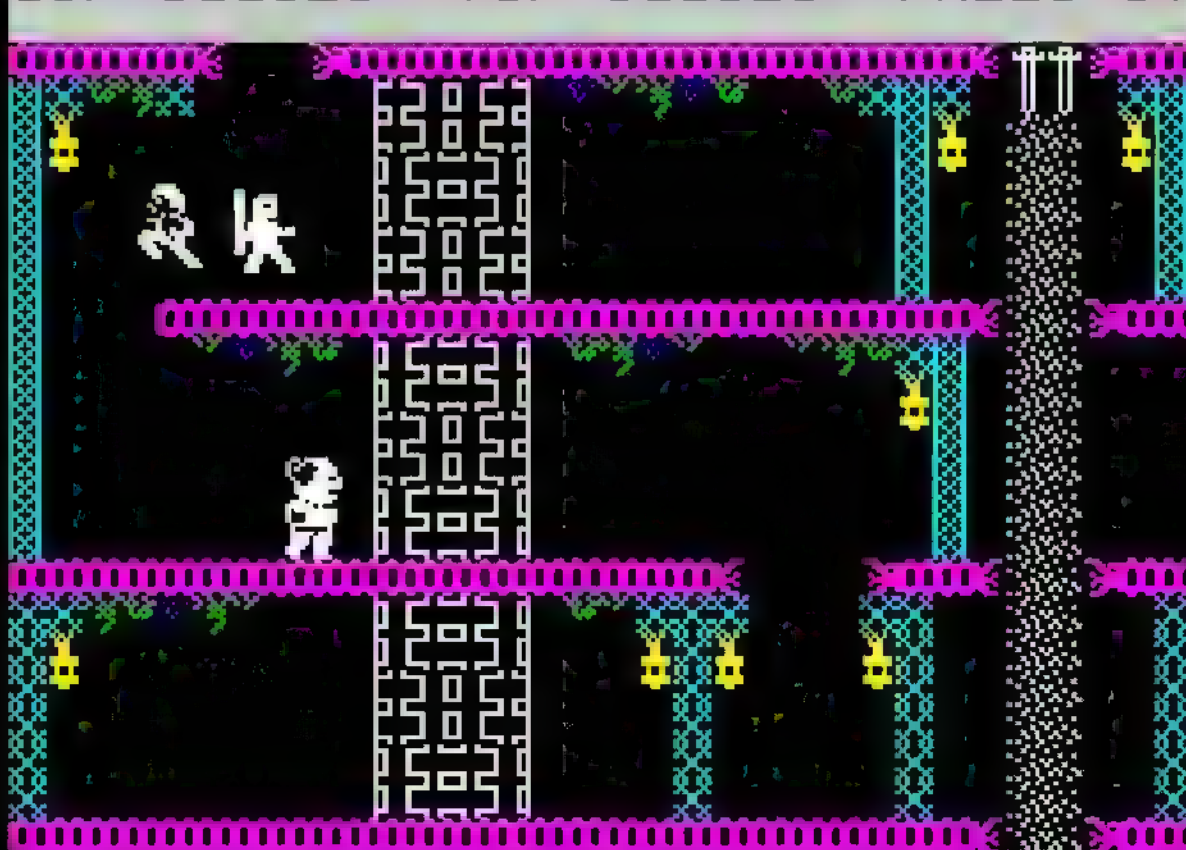
Control is excellent and if you can get to the end, there is a huge end boss to fight.

It seems almost everything is right with this game and it is great to play, even today. A good solid challenge that will keep you coming back.

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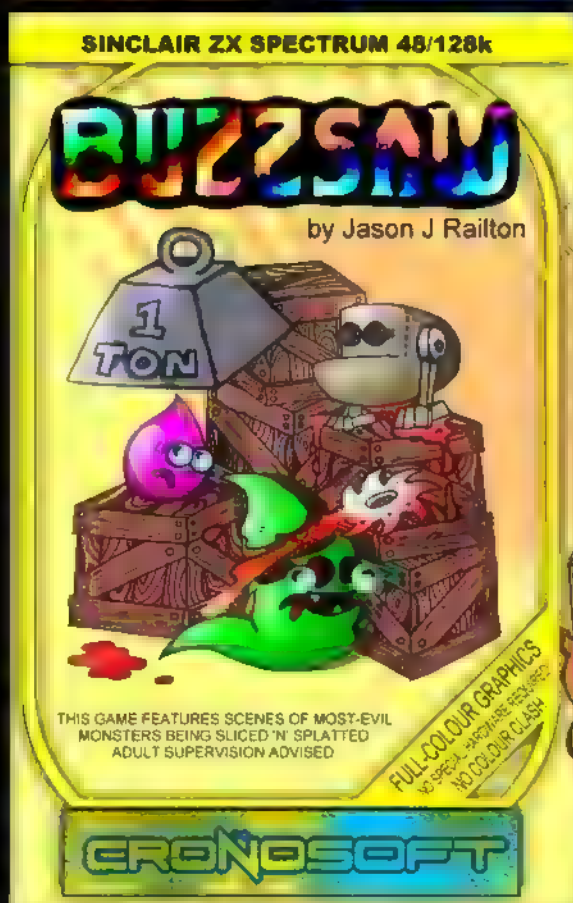


1UP 011525 TOP 011525 FALLS 04



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<https://cronosoft.fwscart.com>

CD REVOLUTION



IT'S THE NINETIES AND RETRO CDs ARE EVERYWHERE

As time moved on for us Spectrum loving people, we found ourselves in the early days of emulation. Somewhere in the early 90's there was a free for all on files, not much knowledge of how to go about things and a general feeling of re-living your youth for free.

As usual, where there is a desire there are always companies stepping in to try and make money. You only have to look at recent console re-releases to see that it's still happening.

One way to make money, so several companies thought, would be to release CDs containing an emulator plus a set of ROMs and game files. These were all freely available on the internet at the time but they were targeting the technically non-savvy users and users who didn't have the time or knowledge to get emulators working.

The Spectrum had several of these CDs including Speccy Classix 97 and later 98, Speccy 3000 and a few more. There was also this triple pack, Spectrum Allstars, sold exclusively by GameStation, a UK computer and game store.

Originally released as two separate items, GameStation grabbed the product, added a third disc and packaged them all into this exclusive set in September 2008.

I had to hook up my partner's old laptop to install this onto the hardware and software it recommended, just to see how it performed on the type of system it was aimed at.

The packaging, install and software all looks very professional for what is just an emulator and a small number of games.

Disc one contains games such as 3D Ant Attack, Bloodwyth, Super Kid, Egghead, Egghead 2 and Deathscape. Some are more known than others, but the big names spring out straight away. The disc also contains a large number of Jonathan Cauldwell games and it seems there was some kind of deal going on here.

The Emulator

The emulator is called simply ZX Emulator v1 and the URL works but just shows this.

This holding page for www.alten8.com has been here since mid 2017. Not sure how long we have to wait for something awesome?

The other named company, retro-soft.co.uk, seems to vanish off the web in late 2006. A few months prior to that their site was boasting about having signed a lot of game authors to

provide their titles for the compilations.

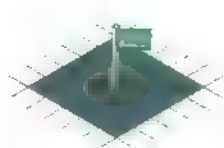
Back to the emulator which, according to a forum I found, was written by a single man in Karachi and not based on any other similar products as some people's postings were insinuating.

Once launched we get a small window and a list of games. Double clicking a game opens the emulator and you then have to press the enter key to load it.

The emulator claims to have the rights to use the Sinclair ROMs from Amstrad but there is no way to confirm this.

The window is small, far too small to be of any use but, it can be switched to full screen. However the performance drops and the games do run slower. This often makes the sound terrible and makes the games stutter. I am using this on a 2.8ghz Intel Celeron. A decent machine for back then.

Coming Soon



The emulation, apart from the full screen option, is pretty good for the games supplied although there are some sound issues especially for 128k games.

On The Disc



Looking at the files on the disc there seems to be unused things lurking in various folders. There is a maps folder containing maps of the games but no way to view them via the installed emulator. In the emulator folder on the computer there are also some graphic files that are not used. For example there is an Alphacom 32 printer logo.

Looking at the games folder, I wondered if I added a TAP file and screen shot would make the game appear in the emulator front end. I copied across a few games, loaded the emulator and nothing showed. There seems to be some kind of restriction on this, allowing only the files supplied to work.

The Other Discs

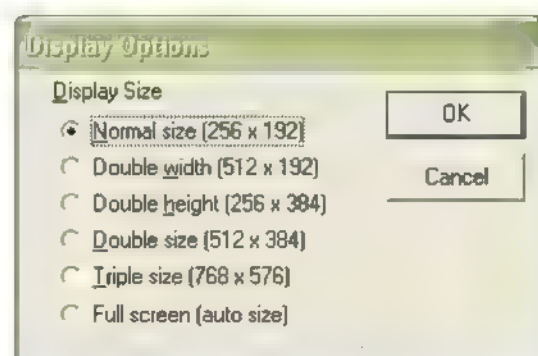
Disc two contains games such as Skool Daze, Wheelie, Pheenix, Back to Kkool, Everyone's Wally, Game Over and Combat Zone.

Installing these though did not put them into the same folder as the first batch as expected. Instead it installs into completely separate folder with another version of the emulator. This means you have to run either v1 for the first set of games or v2 for the second set. Very annoying.

To make things worse, some of the games don't even work.

Disc three contains Aqua Squad, Egghead 3, Fun Park, Megablast and more Jonathan Cauldwell games. This doesn't auto install either and the disc just contains a few games and the stand alone emulator.

Installing this third emulator and now we can load any game we want. It seems the restrictions have been taken off it. I loaded a selection of games not on the CDs and although they played OK, there were still audio problems again for 128k games. This version also allowed different screen sizes to be selected, a distinct improvement over the previous two.



As a purchase, I would have expected more for my cash. The forums from 2006 claim each disc would sell for around £4.99, but I can't find any reference to sales on the internet, apart from the odd second hand item on Amazon. Even paying £4.99 for just 20 games was madness if you had the knowledge yourself. The games took up a very small percentage of the space on the CD too, so again I guess they were milking this for all they could.

Only the third disc, with the unrestricted emulator would have been useful, as each person has their own favourite games. Limiting the emulator was obviously a ploy to get you to buy the next one.


An interesting time in emulation history and one soon to be cut short by copyright claims and interventions by companies wanting to protect their property.

Does owning this CD give me the legal rights to play these games now? That is an interesting question. It depends on the contracts entered into by the authors.

I don't think I will be keeping this emulator and files on the machine. There are far better emulators and many more games to be had now, or even back then for that matter. You could get Speccy Classix and have 3000 games and an emulator for a few pounds more and it doesn't involve multiple installs and files stored in multiple folders.

One for collectors only.





COLOUR

CLASH

Mat Dolphin Explores
The Wonderful World Of
Colour Clash



What is the Spectrum's greatest asset?

Is it the small size or classic design?

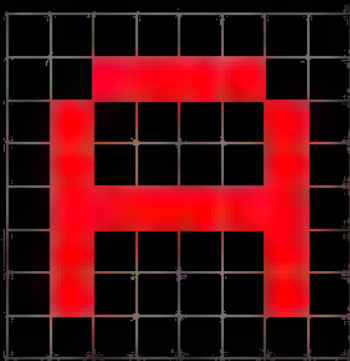
The ever growing software library?

No - none of these...

Its greatest asset is a graphics display limitation that gives every game a distinctive look. That display limitation is most commonly known as colour clash - but what is it?

Sir Clive's previous machines had been much simpler affairs with monochrome displays. The ZX80 and ZX81 displayed one colour, black symbols on a white background. So when the ZX82, as it was known in the early days, was re-christened the Spectrum, the new machine was sold on its greater memory but also on the possibilities of playing with 16 colours.

Programmers couldn't wait to get started and see what kaleidoscopic creations they could come up with. The sky was the limit. However, things weren't that simple. Although there were 16 colours, two of them were black, but worse was to come though. Across the screen of 256 x 192 pixels, only two colours were permitted to exist in any block of 8x8 pixels.

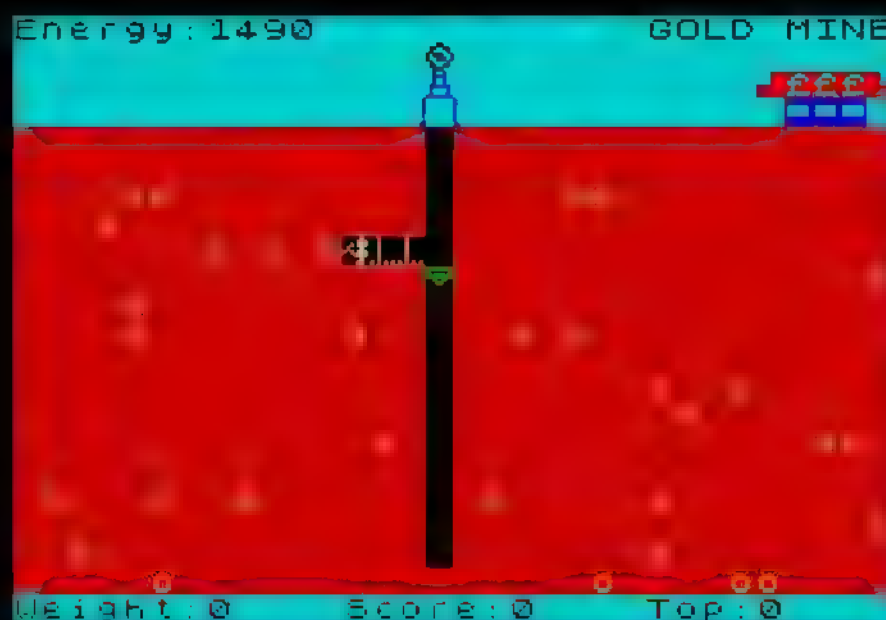


The first attribute was called INK colour and the second PAPER colour. Think of it in terms of foreground and background. If a third colour suddenly found its way into the same place then one of the colours had to give way and the results were messy. So why was this done?

Let's not forget that the Spectrum was not originally designed as a

games machine. Sir Clive originally envisaged the computer that would enter homes and offices and bring computing power to the British public.

Two colours per character block was probably thought of as perfectly adequate for most applications, for example, displaying text in an interesting way. But the most likely explanation is the performance. It simply ran quicker and saved resources by having a two colour limit per character block.



In 1982 programmers started making games. They wanted to create colourful images and move them around the screen. Many found that the simplest way to avoid colour clash was to limit sprites and backgrounds to the 8x8 pixel character blocks. Resulting games looked simplistic compared to what was achieved in subsequent years.

Later though, programmers found clever ways to live with the problem, tackle it, and eventually even beat it. Its time to pay tribute to some innovative techniques.



Technique 1:

Keep the colours away from each other.

Keep everything on a black background, keep graphics away from each other and hope for the best. Sprites got bigger but playing areas looked a bit stark. A good example of this technique was The Pyramid by Fantasy Software. The sprites are large and coloured differently, there are no details at all in the background, and this avoids issues with colour clash. If the main sprite however, moves over an enemy, colour clash can be seen:

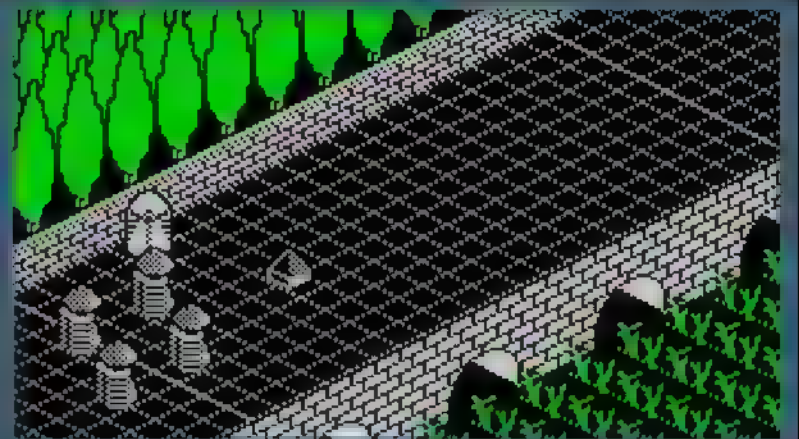


Technique 2:

Make your playing area monochrome.

The vertical scrolling games, especially those designed for the Spectrum, used the really blacker field certainly to avoid the playing area's need for multiple color scrolling. Despite a monochrome look, graphics could be kept, detailed.

A good example of this would be the game 'The Pyramid' by Fantasy Software. The main playing area is black, and the sprites are colored, and the background is black, avoiding color clash.



Technique 3:

Scroll colourful backgrounds in one direction.

Smooth scrolling of a colourful playing area could be achieved by restricting the direction of scrolling. In Zynaps (Hewson Consultants) the playing area only moves horizontally. So scenery like the blue and yellow lattice structures in the game can appear very colourful without colour clash.

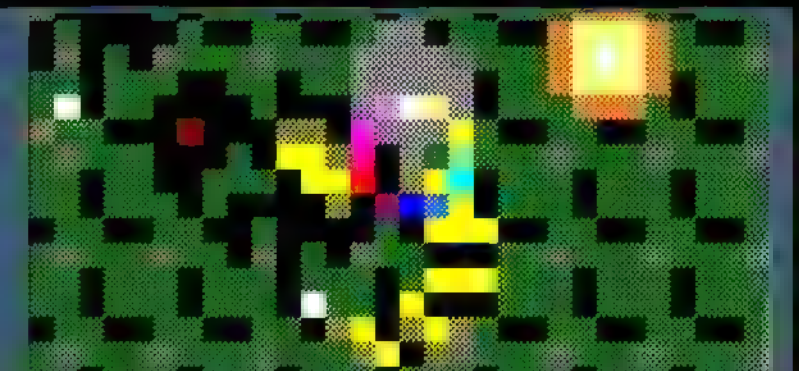
Executer achieves a similar effect but this time the scrolling is vertical and so the features on the walls like pipes for example, can be colourful and close together.



Technique 4:

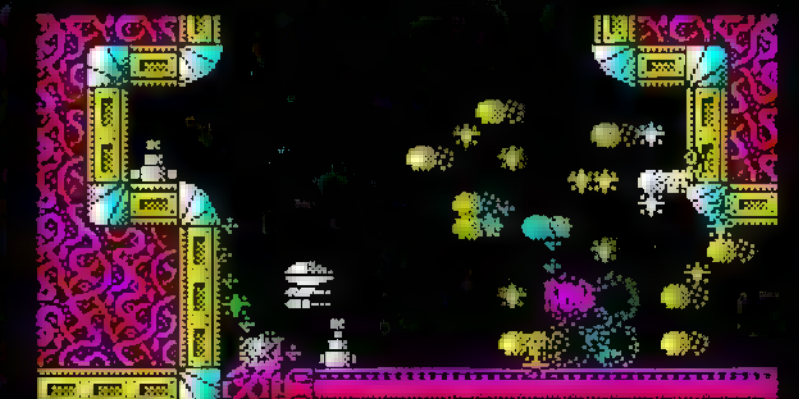
Use simple blocky graphics.

Low games, and they are certainly one, used the second approach of keeping the graphics restricted to just a few colors. They then compensated with speed in horizontal scrolling. This was not to maximum in Cyberoid by Hewson Consultants.



Technique 5: Too much going on.

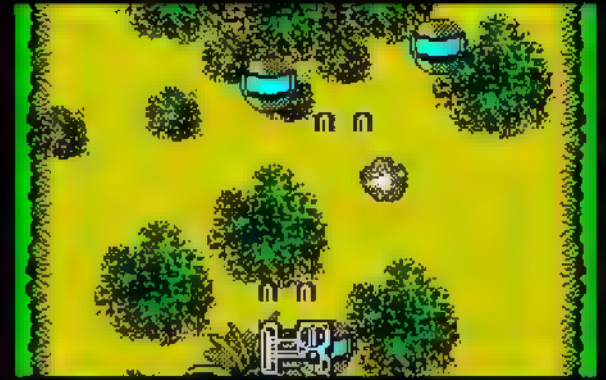
In some games, there is literally so much happening on screen that any colour clashes are hard to spot. A good example of this would be Cyberoid from Hewson Consultants.



Technique 6: Move your sprites in character blocks.

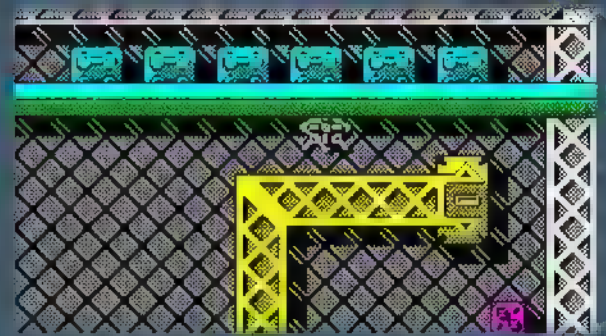
Popular in later years, but done earlier to great effect in the excellent Lightforce by Gargoyle games. This technique more than any other, uses the Spectrum's weakness as a strength. Sprites and scenery are moved eight pixels at a time resulting in some really fast animation and movement with no colour clash.

A really early example of this is Sinclair's Stop The Express, which still looks good even compared to later games.



Technique 7: Monochrome sprites on a colourful foreground.

The sprites are monochrome but they routinely disappear behind bits of foreground scenery which are neatly confined to character blocks in straight lines and rich on colour and detail. In Dan Dare, Dan and his enemies run behind colourful columns and pillars while in Shadow Skimmer the player's ship moves beneath the overhead scenery.



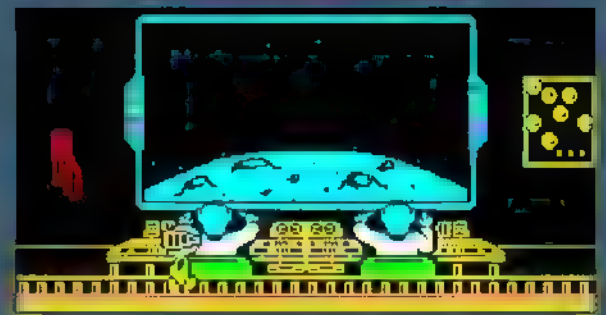
Technique 8: Large Sprite masks.

The late, great Mike Singleton took the unusual step of surround all of his characters with a shadow (sprite mask) which was up to eight pixels thick. In this way, characters could walk past each other but there was no colour clash in sight.



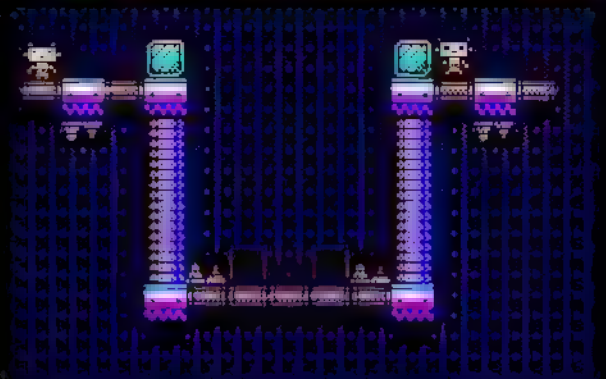
Technique 9: Foreground sprites assume background colour.

In this method the background scenery is colourful but the foreground sprites move around almost like they are transparent. This avoids any background colour corruption, but the downside is the foreground sprites do have a habit of sometimes being difficult to spot. Some games such as Knight Lymé gave us the option to change this to our personal preference. Either updating the background or ignoring it.



Technique 10: Tell colour clash it doesn't exist.

Some very clever coding using a rapid display trick to make it look like there are more colours in each 8x8 character block than are actually feasible. This is becoming more common as people use engines like Nirvana to achieve this effect. Initially I was cynical that this really worked, but it does indeed perform as expected on real machines.



So what does this all mean?

It means that there are some very clever programming achievements out there which are worthy of closer attention. It also means that Spectrum games will always look a bit different from other formats, and in my humble opinion, that's what makes them special.

GEM CHASER

© 1990 by Wolfy and Smith 2015

This uniquely playable platform puzzler certainly gets the brain working and your reflexes twitching. The aim is simple, as it is with all great games, collect gems. There is however, a slight twist in that you must only collect gems that are the same colour as you.

You can change colour using the various gates, and this is where the puzzle and strategy come in. Some gems are placed in such a way that you have to change direction in mid air because colliding with the wrong coloured gem will result in your overall time being reduced.

Each well designed level, and there are 40 of them, has a time limit. Some of them very tight, so it's action all the way. No time to think your way through, you just act on instinct.

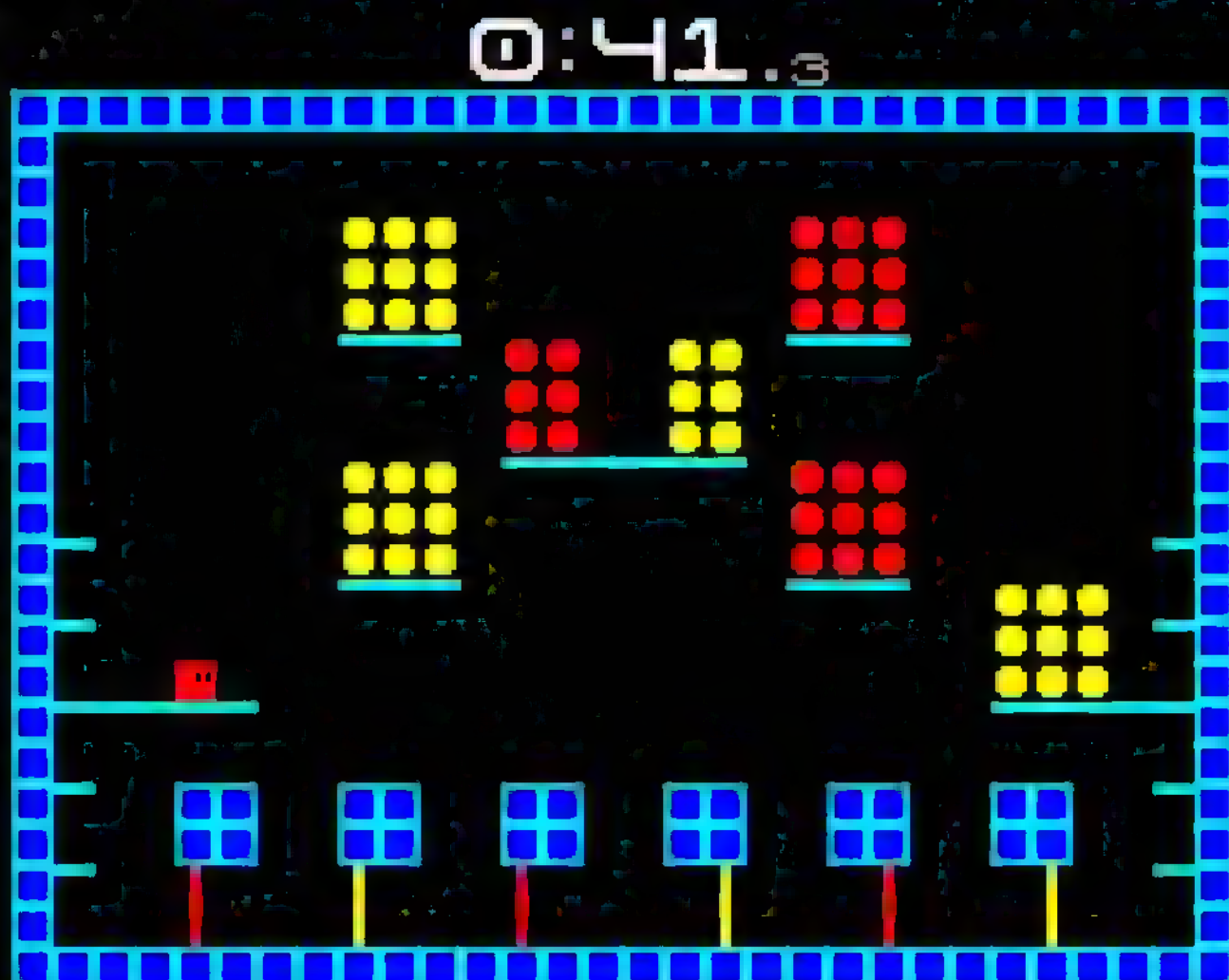
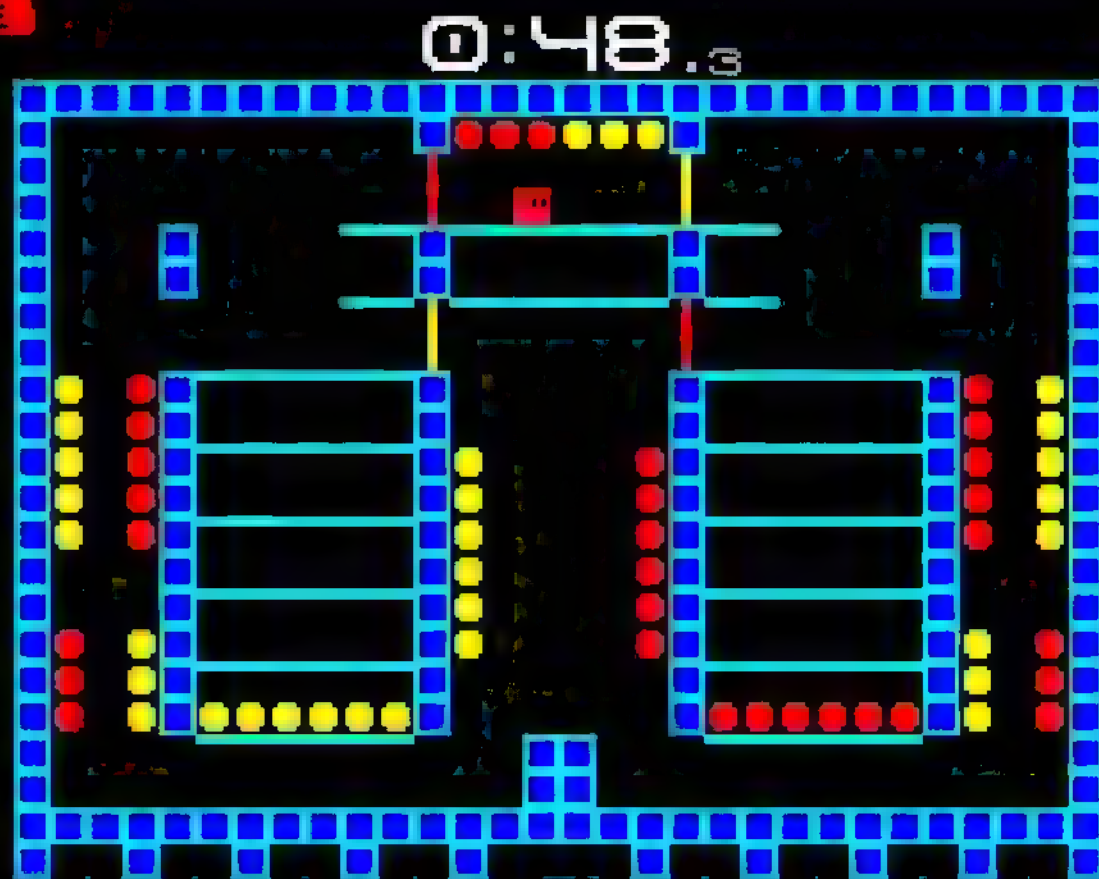
Sometimes just a small slip up means there is not enough time to complete the level, and this can get a bit frustrating, but you always want to get back to have another try.

The graphics are simple, but this makes the gems easier to spot, and the controls are just left, right and jump.

You can jump up between floors to get back to the top of the screen, which is often needed to get gems uncollectable at the start because you were not the right colour.

There is some nice music on the intro screen, but limited effects while playing, the sound of the timer clicking down gets more pronounce as time drains away and this adds to the panic.

A great game, easy to play and very addictive.



SCRAMBLE

Back in the early days of the Spectrum most games released were arcade clones and this one is no different. The name gives it away and this is Mikro-Gen's version of the arcade classic Scramble.

There were several problems with trying to re-create this brilliant arcade game on the Spectrum; smooth scrolling landscapes with two layers of colour, fast moving sprites, multiple enemy types and a very distinct sound. Mikro-Gen though did a decent job considering it was a very early release and that the Spectrum does not have hardware scrolling. Having said that, the game is not arcade perfect but is a challenge to play.

The aim of the game, in case you did not know, was to get as far as you can, shooting or dodging missiles, bombing fuel dumps to keep your fuel level up, and avoiding the landscape. The landscape changes as you progress, but this version differs from the arcade in several areas. First there is no cave roof section and second the landscape never changes colour, it is always magenta.

Early Mikro-Gen games had their own distinctive sounds, and this one keeps those. There are different offerings for zaps and sirens as you play. I really liked the Mikro-Gen sounds and something about them reminds me of their games. They are different from other titles at the time.

Control differs from the arcade version in that you press right to move right, but when you release the ship moves back left on its own. This means you have to have a slightly different approach when tackling tight caverns and fast moving enemies. You cannot move left in this game and have to rely on inertia.

There are separate firing and bombing keys, and this proves to be a tricky game to master especially when there is little space to manoeuvre in later levels.

A decent effort for an early game, and although not one of the best versions, it does a good enough job to warrant a try.

You can see my full scramble shoot out in episode 22.

Mikro-Gen 1983



Score; 100

Fuel; 33

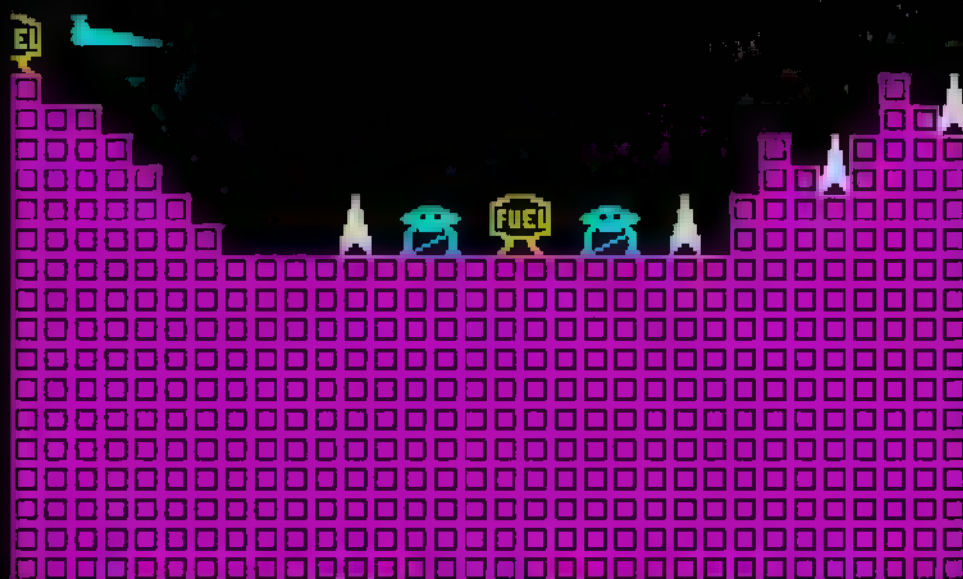
Max;



Score;

Fuel; 81

Max; 2160



Score; 770

Fuel; 68

Max; 2160



SPECTRUM 128

SINCLAIR'S FINAL SPECTRUM

Fist rumoured around May 1985 in Popular Computing Weekly, the Spectrum 128 was very much a must have machine as soon as it was revealed. It was the old Spectrum we all loved but with more. Getting out on time proved to adhere to Sinclair's typical projects.

It was around May 1985 that cracks began to show in Sinclair's business if the news stories plastered all over the popular magazines were to be believed. Robert Maxwell was looking to take over Sinclair causing headlines and sending shivers down the spines of every Spectrum owner. Luckily this never came to fruition though.

As time marched on and Sinclair were staggering about trying desperately to raise some money to stay afloat, other companies were in the race to produce 128k machines. Many magazines had adverts and news stories from most major manufacturers, that their next model would have an amazing 128k of RAM, and Sinclair were quick to join in. They already

had plans to produce the machine, but the growing pressure may have caused them to reveal their aims sooner than they had hoped. It did mean that Spectrum owners would not jump to a new machine, and gave potential backers something to work with if Sinclair were to be saved. The big question, after the Micro-drive delays would be, could they produce it on time?

One of the major computing shows, the PCW show, was imminent and it was rumoured to be the venue that Sinclair would make the official announcement. It was rumoured they would even confirm the delivery to the public of the new machine; late September 1985.

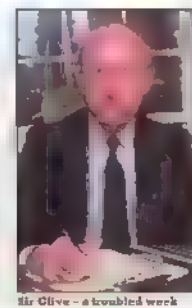
It was a time of turmoil for Clive's company

though and it was uncertain if they would run out of money before they could release the micro. The announcement never came and the machine did not arrive as rumoured. Despite all of this, Sinclair's future was beginning to look a little bit brighter with several companies showing an interest. Maybe the 128 did help a bit after all.

Sinclair seeks £15m finance and may sell C5

SINCLAIR RESEARCH has run into financial trouble for the first time in its six year history. It confirmed last week that it hopes to raise between £10 million and £15 million from venture capitalists and other sources to rescue the company. This followed the announcement that

Sir Clive Sinclair plans to step down as chief executive and the company is now looking for someone to take his place. Sir Clive wishes to return to more technical work within Sinclair, but there is no possibility of his giving up the chairmanship. He has been reported to be considering

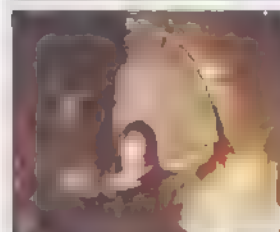


Sir Clive - a troubled week

16 May – 22 May 1985

It's the best selling weekly

Vol 4 No 20



Spectrum 128K from Sinclair?

Delays, chip prices and excuses arrived almost weekly as the public clamoured for news and finally, in October, the machine was finally launched – but only in Spain. This was said to allow stocks of the Plus machine to be sold before introducing the more powerful micro. The UK public were unhappy, but Sinclair had to make some money somewhere, they had to keep the retailers onboard. By launching in Spain they at least proved the product existed and this, it was hoped, would bolster any offers they might receive to bail out the company.

Clive fights on as rescue fails

As November arrived Sinclair hinted that the machine would be available to UK buyers in the new year. This would mean losing out to the very lucrative Christmas market, a big mistake that would have undoubtedly lost them revenue and fans.

December brought news that the first batches of the machines had arrived in the UK, but were as yet still not available. Magazines offered the suggestion that these units were stocks in preparation for the launch. Sinclair refused to comment.

January brought little in the way of delivery, but Sinclair were now gearing up to launch the machine that was first promised over four months ago. Software houses had now

jumped on the bandwagon and were advertising new 128k games in readiness for the anticipated flood of purchases.

Finally in February the Sinclair Spectrum 128 was made available for general sale in UK.

The memory had been increased from 48 to 128k and this meant games could be massive, if the hype was to be believed. On the down side though, it would take a long time to load them and as developers were finding out, the memory was not all in one chunk, they had to switch between 16k banks.

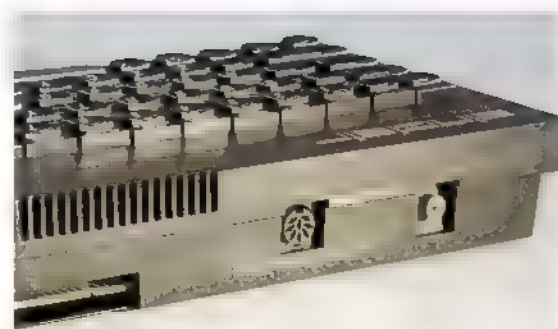
The sound had been changed too and the 128k had an addition to the original 1bit beeper and speaker, an AY chip. It wasn't as good as the Commodore's SID chip but it could be pretty amazing, especially as the user base had grown up with the limitations of the Spectrum's original models.

The machine looked like the 48k plus with the styled black keys and white lettering. The case though was longer and much heavier due to the heat sync on the right hand side. This metal styling soon gave the machine its famous nickname – the toast rack.

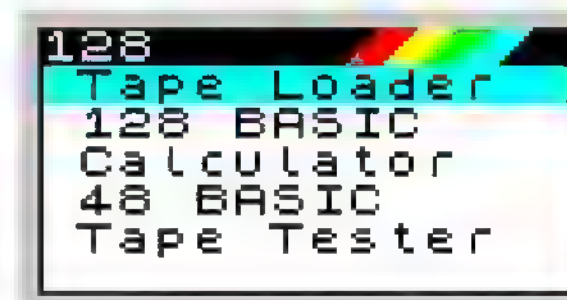
At the back we still had the expansion port but added to this was a whole set of other exciting things.

An RGB port to connect the machine to a monitor, finally no more RF tuning. Sadly, this was not used to send sound output to the TV, which was a major opportunity missed. The

sound instead still that had to be piped through the RF socket as there was no speaker, or users could use the EAR socket and an external amplifier.



There was a midi port for budding musicians and a serial port for those wanting to connect serial printers or modems. There was also a keypad socket at the front. This allowed you to use the separate numeric keypad but this was only available in Spain for some reason.



The operating system had been given a make over too. We now got a menu when the machine turned on, allowing tape loading without typing commands, it was all very modern looking. The machine came with a new 128 BASIC that did away with the traditional keyword entry of the 48k models and allowed typing in the normal way.

In operation it's much as you would expect – a Spectrum. It looks good, feels good, sounds good and plays good. Especially if you got games that were written to use all of those new features.

It was also compatible with all previous peripherals so things like Microdrives and joystick interfaces worked fine.

Sinclair had big plans for this machine and they wanted to develop a disc drive for it and eventually even wafer scale technology that Clive was working on when things went bad.

As it turned out, Alan Sugar used it as a base to build the Amstrad models with the first Plus Two, the grey one, being more or less a 128 with a cassette strapped on.

A great machine then, that marks a milestone in home computer history and is always high on the list of any fan.



Booty

Firebird Software 1984

There isn't much of a story for this game, but there's not really a need for one. You could make something up easily, but the game I think, speaks for itself. It is not complicated, but it is quite complex with a lot of things to look out for.

You play Jim the cabin boy, aboard a pirate ship, and you have to explore each cabin and collect all of the booty. This comes in the form of many things such as telescopes, trophies, swords, maps and bags of cash. Some of these are also booby trapped, and collecting them will leave a fizzing bomb. These explode a few seconds after they appear, so you need to get Jim away as fast as possible.

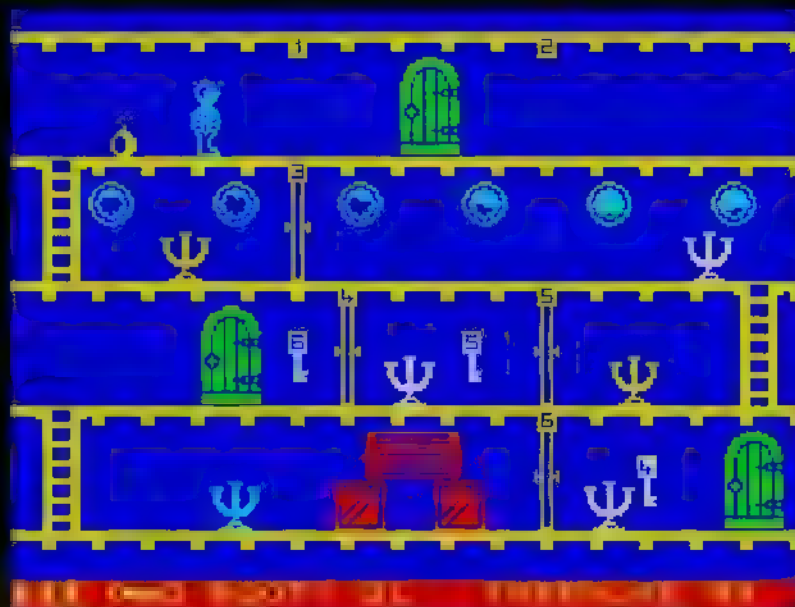
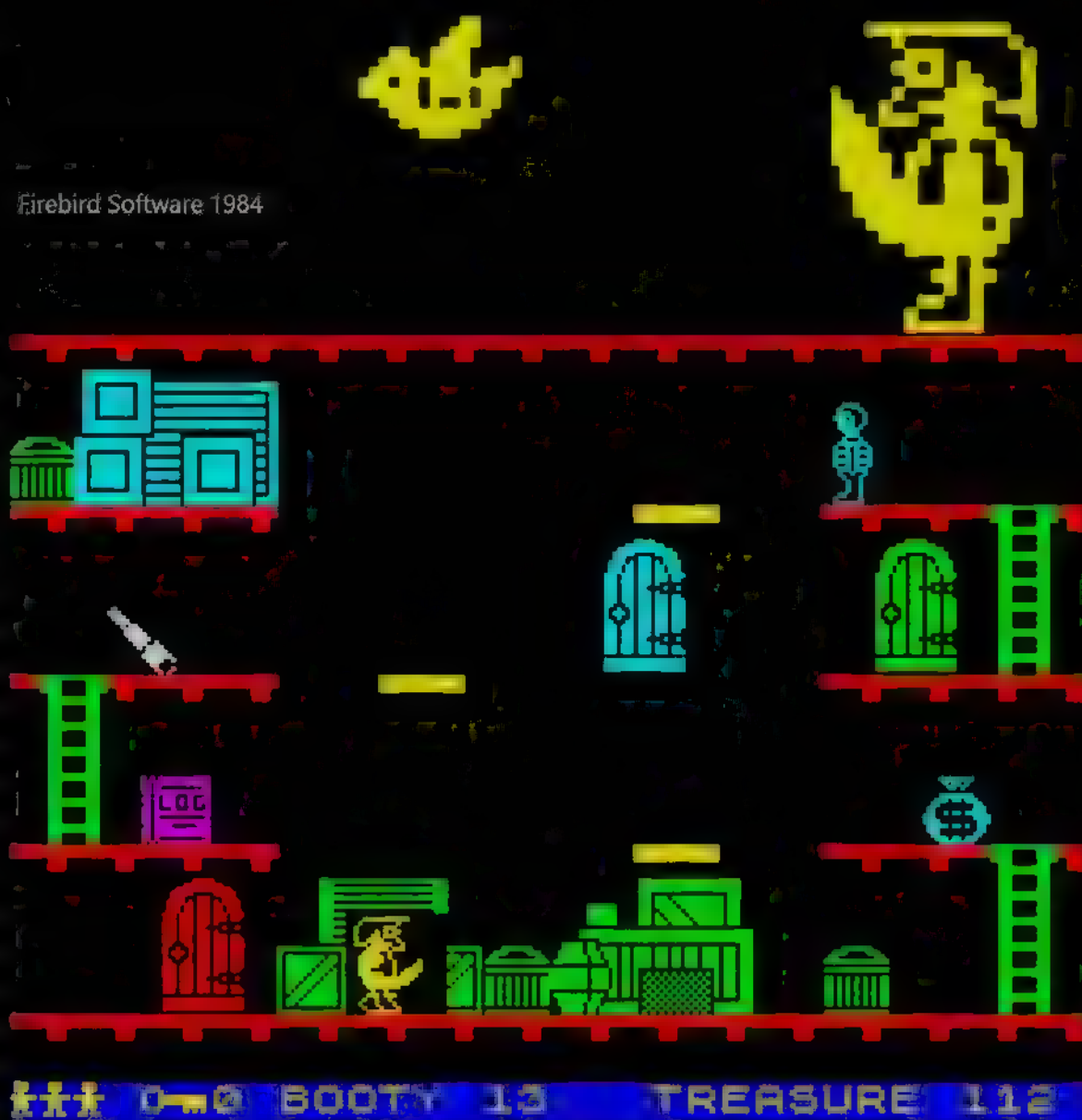
Moving around, Jim can climb ladders but he doesn't have the ability to jump. This means you have to work out how to get to the various items using ladders and moving platforms. Getting the hang of these is important to your success, and a mistimed move will send Jim plummeting to his death.

There are also vanishing floors to contend with, roaming pirates, rats and parrots, not to mention one door that floods the entire ship.

Each screen represents a cabin and has a number of doors. These doors are opened by collecting keys around the cabin. Jim can only carry one key at a time though, so you need a bit of strategy.

The graphics are quite basic, but work well and the animation is good. Things move smoothly and the game plays a continuous tune if you don't turn it off.

This game was going to be released by Rabbit Software as Jolly Roger, but they



went bust just before that, so the author contacted Firebird who quickly took it up.

Once all the booty is collected, a golden key is randomly placed around the game map (according to the instructions) and Jim is given a limited amount of time to find it. When he does, he moves onto another ship to continue his booty collecting. The golden key is actually placed at the same position as the 75th piece of booty Jim collects.

Gameplay is great, with a lot to contend with, and the task of getting all the treasure is challenging. The rooms with multiple moving lifts are tricky, but once you master these, things become a lot easier. There are some random elements, like the rats, that can be frustrating, but overall a great game.

The Secret Game

This game has a little secret too. If you plug in a Currah Speech unit, you get a completely different mini game. Here Jim swims underwater and has to collect fish. You can get to this game by using POKEs on an emulator if you don't have the real hardware.

POKE 52796,32 and POKE 52798,58



More Booty

The Background

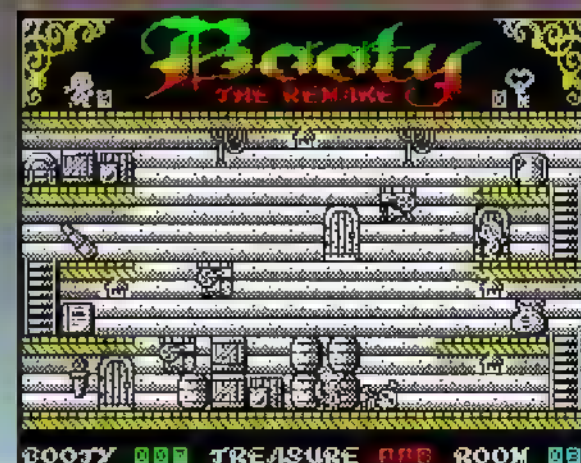
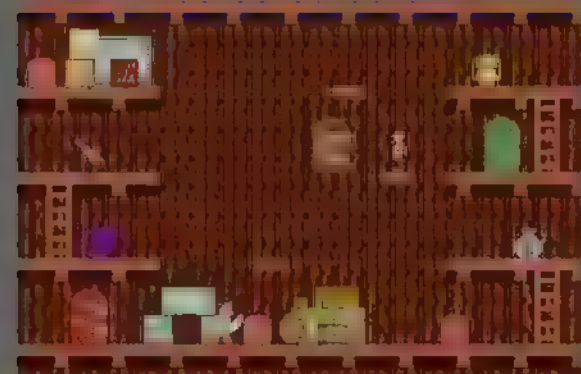
The game is a parody of the classic pirate game, where the player is a pirate who is trying to collect treasure. The game is a parody of the classic pirate game, where the player is a pirate who is trying to collect treasure.

The Gameplay

The game is a parody of the classic pirate game, where the player is a pirate who is trying to collect treasure. The game is a parody of the classic pirate game, where the player is a pirate who is trying to collect treasure.

The Features

The game is a parody of the classic pirate game, where the player is a pirate who is trying to collect treasure. The game is a parody of the classic pirate game, where the player is a pirate who is trying to collect treasure.



THE BIRDS AND THE BEES

Bug Byte Software 1983

This game was heavily advertised as having graphics done by Mathew Smith, the author of Manic Miner, although it is rumoured that he did not actually create them, but instead that they were influenced by him. Either way, it produced a lot of interest in the game solely because of Mathew's supposed involvement.

The story goes something like this; controlling Boris Bee you have to set out to collect pollen from the various flowers across a horizontal scrolling garden. Hardly exciting you might think, but the game does provide a decent challenge.

As you control Boris you will encounter a number of enemies including large birds, aeroplanes and caterpillars. All of these have to be avoided for obvious reasons.

The control is tricky, as it involves keeping Boris flying by continually stabbing the up key while using left and right to change direction. This often means your bee floats out of control due to the inertia involved, and this is the game's challenge. If the control was fixed to a stop start movement, the game would be rather dull.

Once you locate a flower, flying into it will cause Boris to grab the pollen, and this fills up the pollen meter. You need six flowers to fill it completely. Once full, you return back to the hive, again avoiding the enemies. When Boris is full of pollen though, controlling him becomes more tricky as his 'weight' increases.

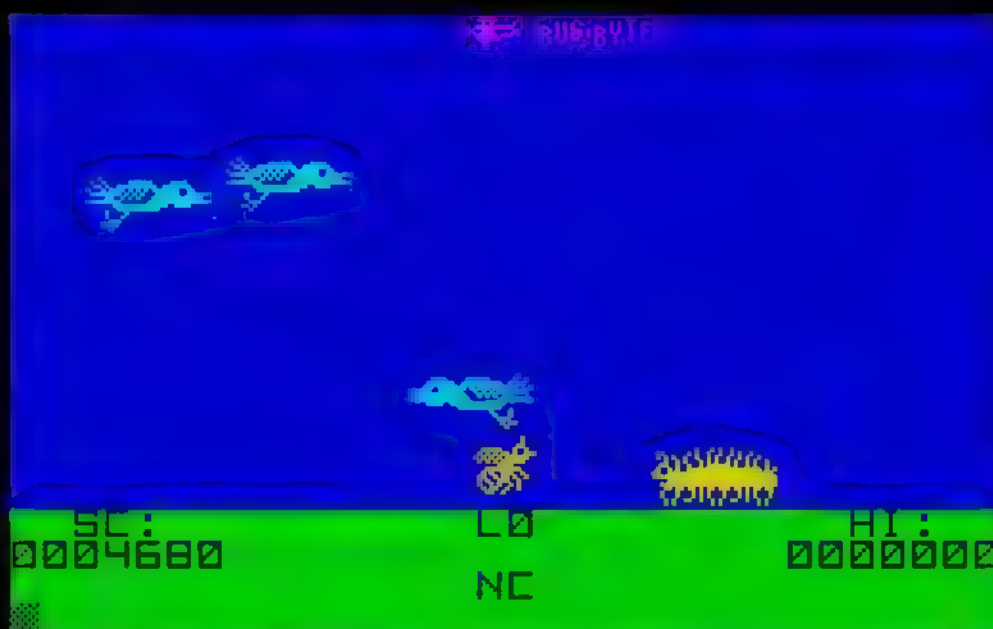
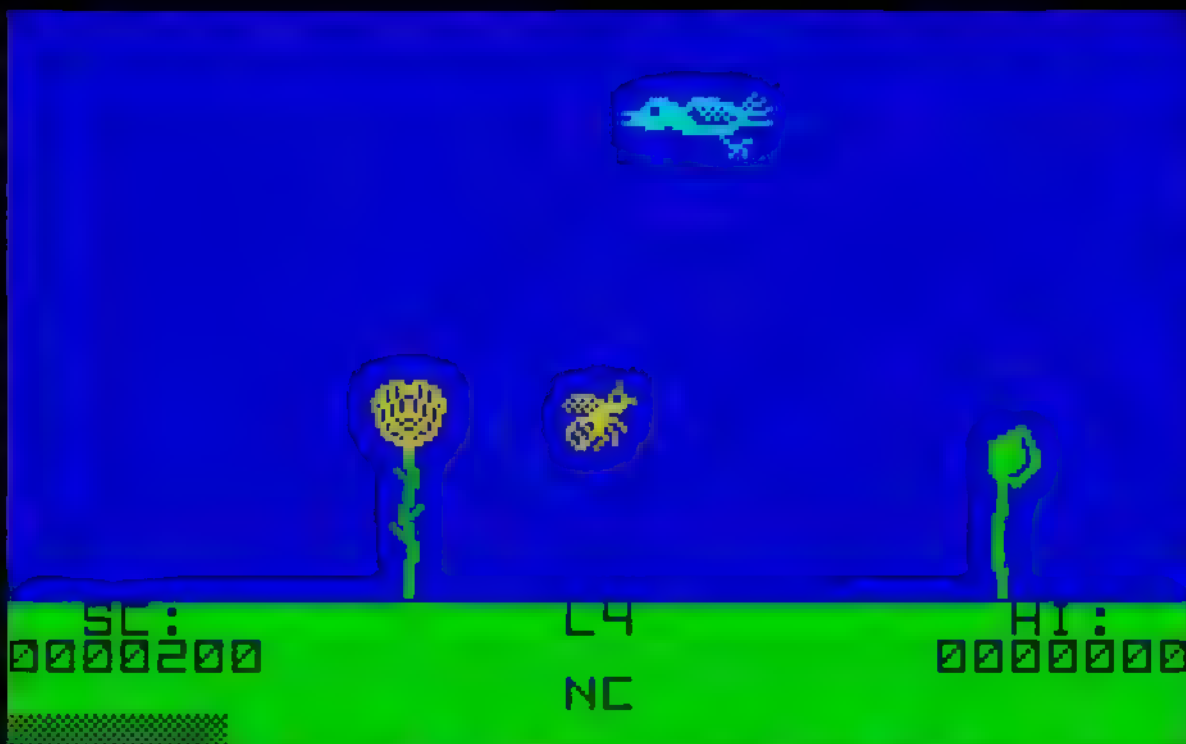
The graphics, as you can see, do look like Mathew had some involvement, and are well drawn and animated.

Sound is used well, with a nice tune on the intro screen, and various spot effects throughout the game and a constant ticking sound that represents Boris' wings.

The control takes a while to get to grips with, but even when you get it right, the flying enemies are still sometimes difficult to avoid, often following you or changing direction.

You do have a Defender-like radar at the bottom of the screen which helps you avoid colliding with them, but as the level progresses, they get more aggressive often flying at speed and suddenly changing direction.

A tricky little game then that's worth a play, but by modern standards, it does look a little dated. Still, good fun for a while though.



ZX Renew

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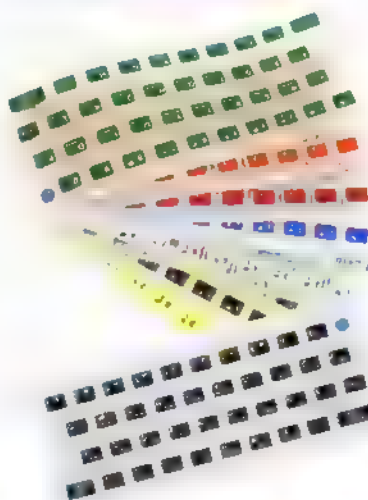
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Power button
Reset switch button
Battery option*
LCD 9" color screen



Laptop version

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Desktop version

£118 Pre-Order

128K ram
Integrated divMMC double SD card interface.
Two joystick 9 pin ports
RGB out
Composite out
HDMI option - not active at the moment. RGB to HDMI adapter can be used.
Power button
Reset switch button

More colours available for cases, mats and faceplates

QUADRON

Andrew Beale 2018

Quadron is an interesting game in that its development started in 1986 with the expected release a year or so later. In fact the game was meant to be published in 1988 by Palace Software, but was cancelled before release. The author has pulled the game code together and finally released it in 2018.

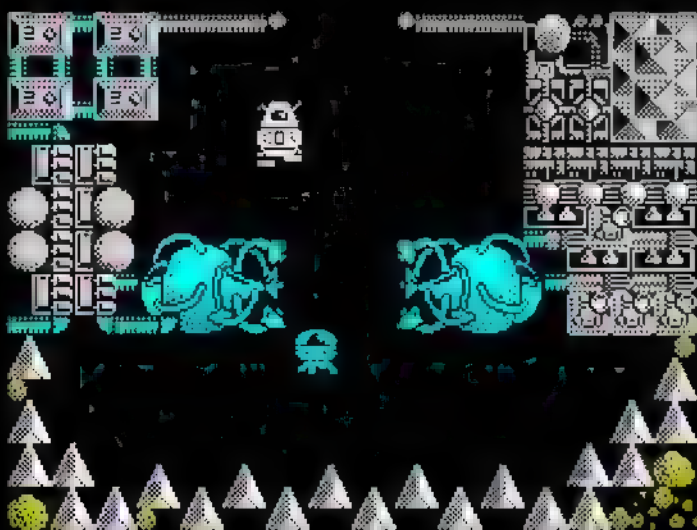
The idea of the game consists of you controlling a robot that has to defend crystals in a complex from marauding aliens. To do this you have to patrol the 28 rooms and destroy any aliens present while at the same time picking up any items as you go.

The graphics are lavish, and in places are reminiscent of Sabre Wulf in many respects, but they are well drawn and look great. The sprites are large and well drawn, and move really well.

Sound is used well, with some nice effects and the explosion effect, done by use of the attribute blocks, looks really nice.

The action is as you would expect for a game of this kind. You move around the rooms and destroy anything that pops up, although there is much more to the game than this.

Different alien types, defined by colour, do different things. Some collect smaller crystals and take them to be transformed into more powerful aliens. These more powerful aliens are then really hard to destroy, taking a lot of shots.



Pressing SPACE will display a sort of status screen. You can see what weapons you have, the map of the playing area is displayed top middle and various other meters and info. You can also use this to drop certain objects and also to teleport to one of the four corners if you have the right item to do so.

If you take too long, yellow aliens appear and try to persuade you to get a move on.

So, this is more than just a shoot-em-up.

You can get power ups and bonuses like normal shooters, but also have to worry about transforming enemies, a bit like defender.

This is a well written game, and if you like this mix of shooting and a bit

of strategy, then this may be worth getting, but it isn't free.

The game can be purchased from the following URL:

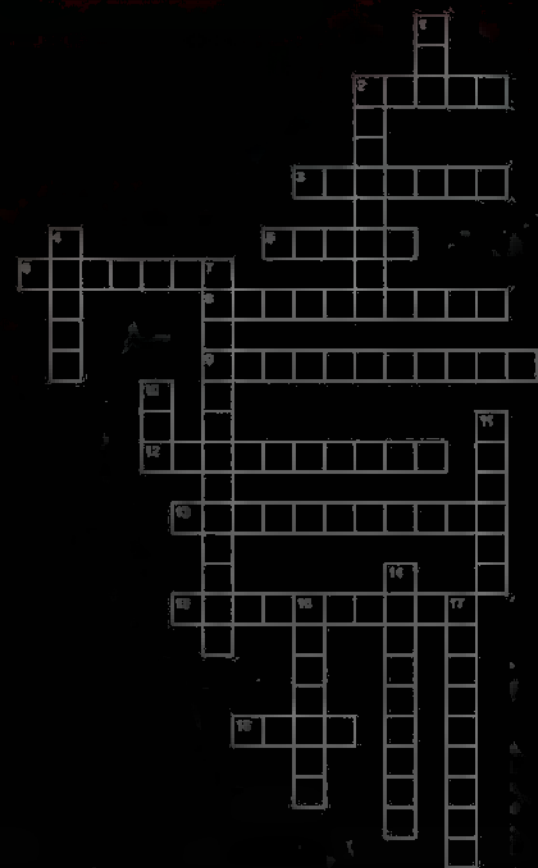
<https://cosmium.itch.io/quadron>



ISSUE CROSSWORD

Here is a cheeky little crossword based on this issue. All answers can be found in these pages, so how well have you read it?

There are no prizes, just the satisfaction of completing it.



Across

- 2 The bee hero
- 3 Fortress
- 5 Country where 128k was launched
- 6 Moonlight ___? follow up to Booty
- 8 Budget CRL label
- 9 Attribute problem
- 12 Father of the V-Drive
- 13 Game shop selling CD Allstars
- 15 Colourful shooter by FTL
- 18 Leopard ___? Kayde game

Down

- 4 Digital Microdrive format
- 2 Author of Gem Chaser (4,5)
- 4 C64 author of Sqj
- 7 CD Compilation (5,7)
- 10 Cabin boy
- 11 Text adventure by the author of Code Zero
- 14 Fat enemy of Bruce
- 16 Hero with a sword
- 17 Highway ___?

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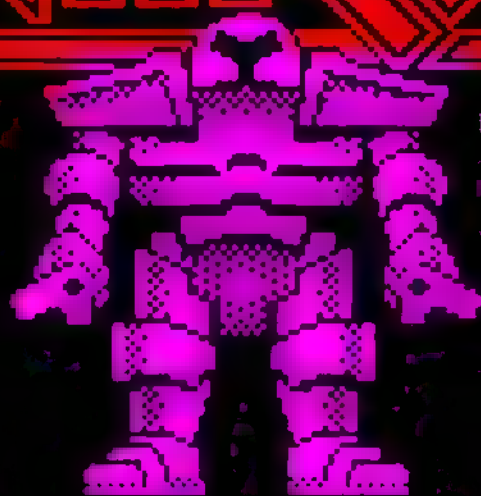


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ANTIRIAD

Palace Software 1986



The year is 2086 and life is peaceful and passive on Earth. That is until an evil alien attack force decide to spoil things. With all human kind taken prisoner and sent to work in the mines, only one can save the entire race, Tal.

He was instructed to seek out the sacred armour of Antiriad so that he may stand against the aliens and save the world. So starts the game.

The instructions also say he has to find other objects too, things like anti-grav boots, something called a particle negator, a pulsar beam and implosion mines. It all sounds exciting, and when you first see the game, the excitement builds.

Antiriad, as you can see from the screen shots, is an impressive looking arcade adventure game with graphics that made an impact on players when it was released back in 1986.

Exploration and map making is key here, as you guide Tal around the various screens that make up earth. There are obviously different things out to hinder you, things like monkeys, large insects, drops of liquid and other weird stuff you wouldn't really think were on earth – but this is 2086 after all.

Your loincloth wearing hero runs around really well, and the animation is excellent. The throwing animation is particularly nice and grabbing the stone on the first screen will help you clear a few nasties later on.

Continuing to move right, you will eventually find the armour, but this bit is not too difficult and once you get it on, the panel at the bottom activates and gives you some information such as health levels.

Standing around doing nothing will slowly fill your health up but isn't really exciting to watch. It is though an essential part of the game if you want to get anywhere.



You can collect energy blocks that are scattered about too and these all help keep you fit and healthy.

However, when you move, the armour stays where it is, which was a bit confusing. The suit merely re-charges your health and is the point where items collected are activated. It seems you can't move in the suit until you have the anti-grav boots. This was a bit disappointing. There is the suit, but you can't put it on until later.

This then forces you to explore, find the item and then return it to the suit.

Once you get the anti-grav boots though, and if you can get that far, you are able to fly around, making movement a bit easier.

Whilst wearing the armour, any items found will be activated automatically, so no need to return to that part of the game.

A drawback with the suit however, is that you can't throw the rocks when wearing it. This means if you find something that requires stones being thrown at it, you have to get out of it first.

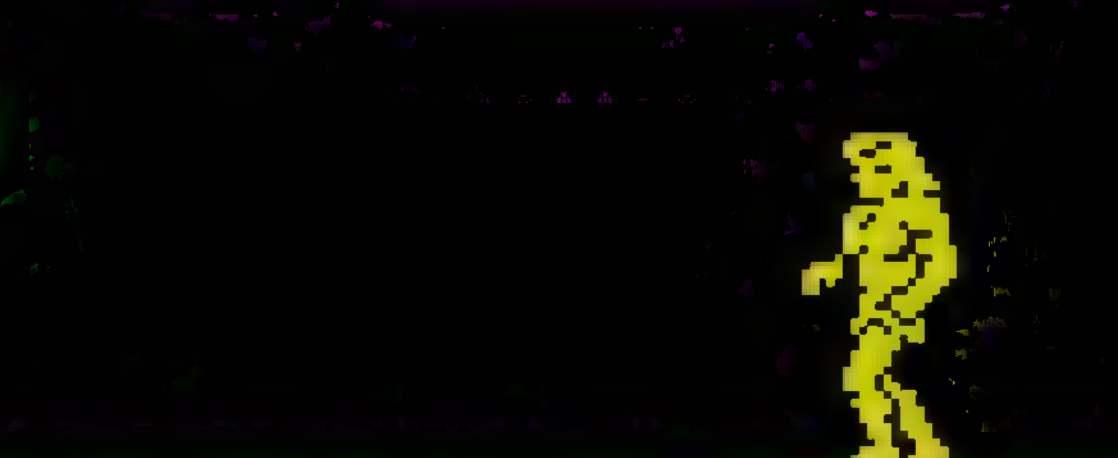
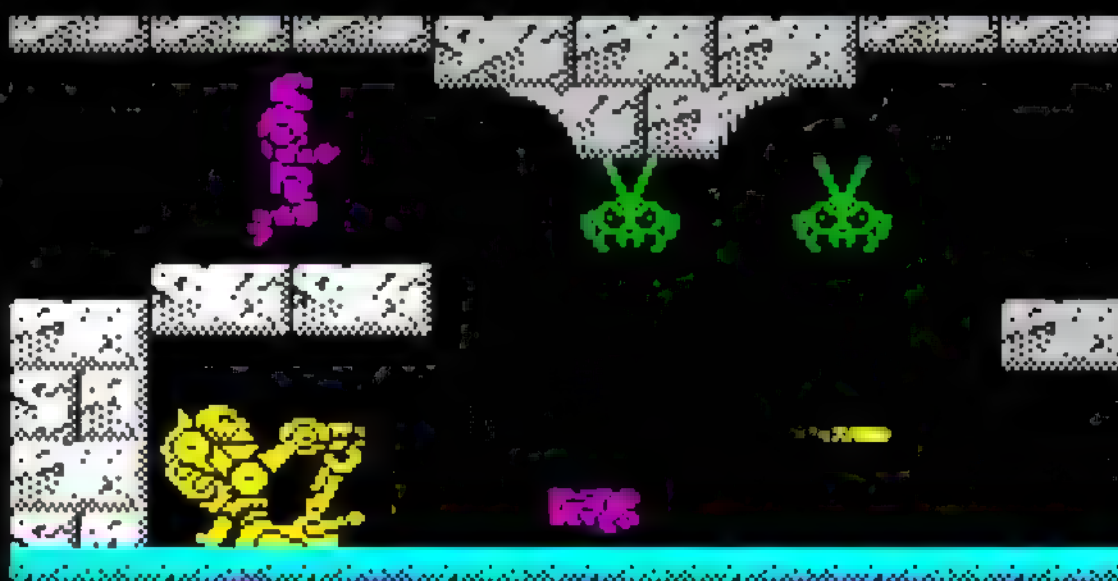
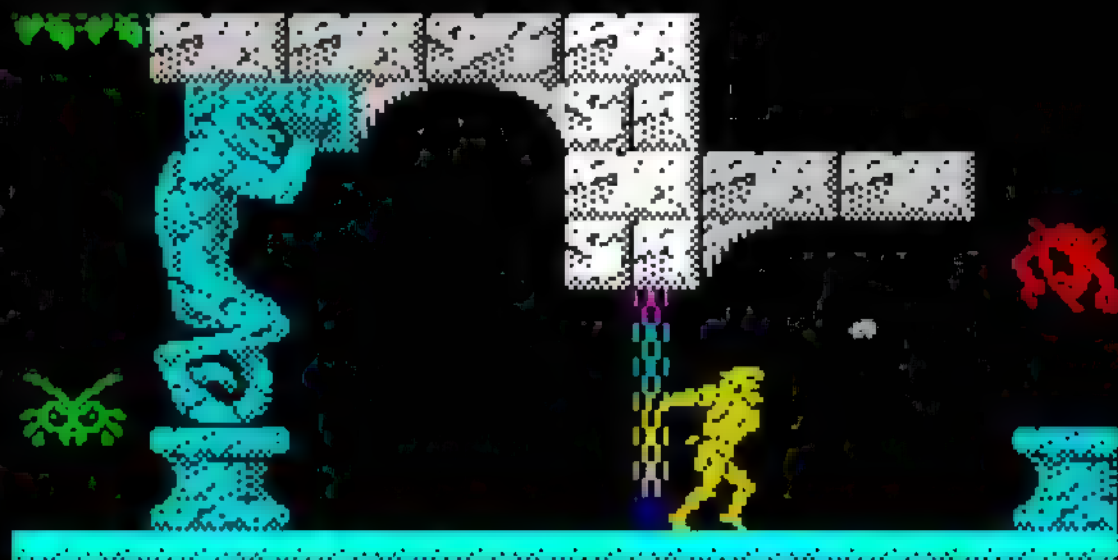
I had to use the RZX playback to see the later parts of the game as it was a bit too tricky to play. More down to me wanting to find things instead of being patient than the game being overly difficult.

The graphics are excellent, with nice detailed and varied backgrounds, good enemy sprites and great animation.

Sound is ok, a bit minimalistic but suited to the game. There are only a few effects for hitting things with rocks and losing energy.

Gameplay wise, its easy to control and the throwing mechanism, which is holding down fire while hitting a direction key, at first is odd, but you soon get used to it.

Overall, a really nice game, and one certainly to have a go at.



DEVIL'S CROWN

Mastertronic 1985

I remember vividly buying Devil's Crown, from WH Smiths, in the town where I lived. I wanted to buy a new game though did not have much money, so I turned to the Mastertronic 199 carousel, even though I knew it was a hit and miss affair.

I do not quite remember what attracted me to Devil's Crown, though looking back now, I could believe it was the game cover, depicting a sub-sea adventure to recover precious gems from a haunted pirate shipwreck. The screenshots are also very appealing, hinting at lots of details in the game.

The backstory for the game tells of a cursed golden crown, which was discovered by a band of greedy pirates. Sadly, the curse got the better of them and sent the pirates and their ship to the bottom of the ocean, along with their precious prize. Skip forward to modern day when, after a long and painstaking search, you have discovered the resting place of the ill-fated vessel. Equipped with the latest in sub-aquatic equipment, you decide to put the rumours of a curse aside and to dive down to the wreck and attempt to retrieve the gems.

Devil's Crown is a collect-the-objects arcade game, in which you have to search the 40 ship locations to find various objects needed to complete the game, while dodging killer fish who steal your oxygen and pirate ghosts who steal your possessions. The graphics are large and colourful (you might find them a bit too colourful) and move smoothly. While the graphics are quite chunky, they are recognisable (plus, when you pick up an object, you will see a description of it near the bottom). Your aim is to collect the precious gems though, before you can do this, you need to prove your worth by collecting some other objects and depositing them in the large cabin, on the main deck.

Your submarine is controlled using up, down, left, and right. However, you are also affected by gravity, which means that unless propelling upwards, you will slowly sink to the bottom. Your movement is also affected by any objects you are carrying: heavy objects, such as

an anchor, will slow you down and make it more difficult to stay buoyant.

The controls are responsive, though the keyboard layout is fixed and a little awkward, especially when using an emulator ('A' – left; 'S' – right; 'O' – up; 'L' – down; 'Caps' – fire). It is better to use a joystick (Kempston, Sinclair, Protek/ Cursor), if you have one.

When playing the game, your current challenge is shown near the bottom of the screen. First, you need to recover three bells and to deposit them into a particular location (which you also need to find).

Given you are under water, maintaining your oxygen supply is essential. As time passes, it



Pantry, main deck

Carrying nothing

Oxygen Level

Score Bullets

002120 50

oxygen you are carrying, leaving you a few short seconds to find a replacement tank. Thankfully, you have a gun with which you can shoot the fish before they get to you. This has a limited supply of bullets, though spare bullets are located around the wreck.

More annoying than the fish, are pirate ghosts, who will quickly steal (actually, swap for something else) what you are carrying when you enter any room where they are present. What you get in return is random, so you might actually get something useful like an



Cannon stores, main deck

Carrying nothing

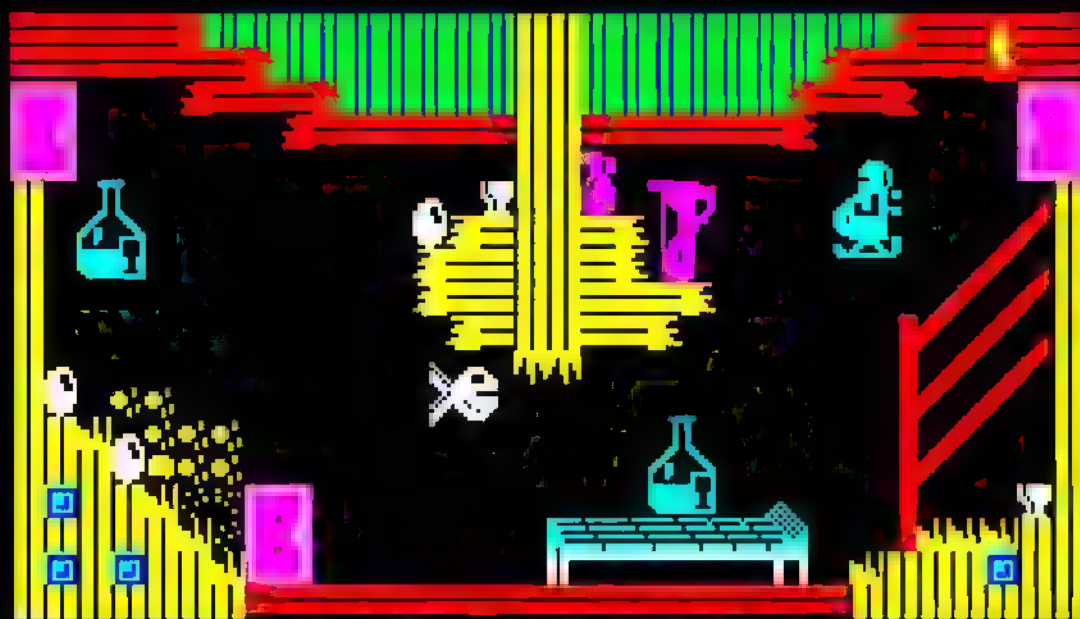
Oxygen Level

Score Bullets

002110 50

will deplete quite quickly, so thankfully there are spare oxygen tanks conveniently placed around the wreck. As hinted at above, many rooms contain deadly fish who will steal any





Dining saloon, quarter deck

Carrying nothing

Oxygen Level

Score Bullets

002100 50

oxygen tank or one of the missing bells. However, this is still frustrating, if you are carrying one of the objects you need to collect. Also, there is a risk that they will give you a Jolly Roger flag, which means instant death and the end of the game.

Some of the rooms are in darkness. You can blindly hunt around for the exit (by trial and error), though you cannot see what objects they contain. It is not much of a spoiler to tell you that you should look out for a lamp on your travels, to help you here.

You will, by now, have started to realise that different objects have different properties and it is important to build up this knowledge to progress through the game. With the exception of bullets and oxygen, you can only carry one object at a time. When you pick up a new object, whatever you were carrying before is left behind. The same happens if you pick up bullets or oxygen, though you can immediately pick up again the object you deposited without losing you bullets or oxygen. Because of this, planning is important, and a crucial part of any plan is a going to be a map.

Unfortunately, the layout of the rooms on the wreck adds its own challenges. Different rooms have different numbers of exits and many rooms have similar sounding names and layouts. You will need a big piece of paper and some patience to map out the game, though this is worthwhile to do, if

you want to stand a chance of completing

As described above, I suspect you will agree this seems quite an engaging game, especially given it was a £1.99 budget title. However, back in 1985, when I bought this game, I did not know much of what I have told you above, because the cassette inlay instructions are very sparse, and leave you mostly on your own to work out how to play the game.

Most frustrating of all, and the reason I did not like this game as a teenager, are the pirate ghosts who steal your inventory. Although the distribution of objects is random for each game, you will almost certainly find your path to the room where you need to deposit objects blocked by a pirate ghost. I made many attempts to manoeuvre past the ghosts, trying different routes and different movement patterns, all to no avail. Eventually, I gave up and concluded the game was too difficult, an example of a rushed-out budget title.

However, when writing this article, 35 years later, I have again started to play

the game and discovered that there is a trick to get past the ghosts and, having worked out what it is, I realise the game is not only more playable but is actually really engaging and fun.

I am not going to tell you the trick (though, there is a clue in this article!). It is (sort of) explained in the Tips section on the World of Spectrum website and I may write a short follow-up for a future issue of the magazine to explain what to do. However, for now, I will leave it a secret in the hope you may enjoy finding the answer for yourself.

So, in summary, I think Devil's Crown is a really good game that is spoiled by rubbish instructions. A few extra lines to help me get started and to point me in the right direction would have probably meant I got much more enjoyment out of this game, back in the 1980s. Thirty-five years on and with a renewed sense of purpose, I plan to tackle the Devil's Crown again and hope, over the next month or so, to recover the gems from the wreck (or, at least, get a decent high score).

If you like the early find-the-objects arcade adventures, then I think you will really enjoy this game. Do not be put off by the instructions. Hopefully, the extra hints I have provided above will be enough to prepare you for some deep-sea exploration.

Review by George Beckett



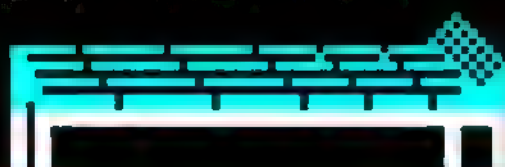
Large cabin, quarter deck

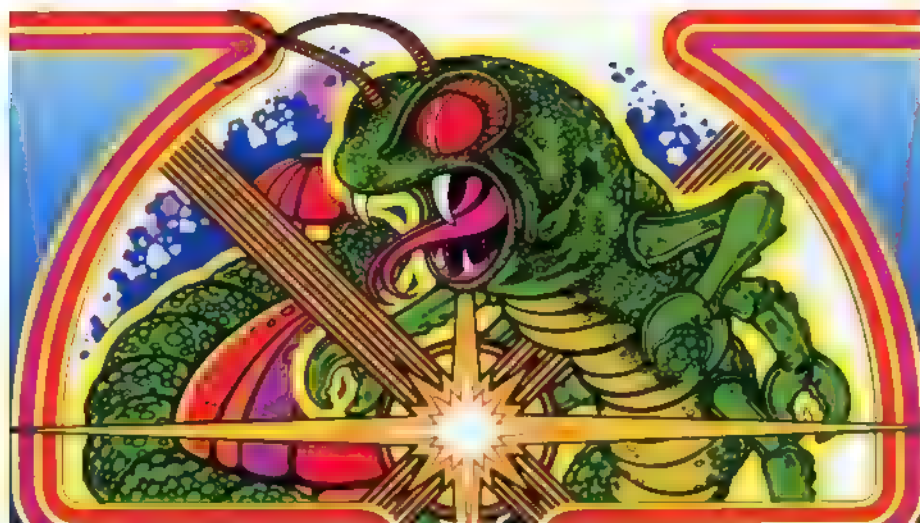
Recover three golden bells

Oxygen Level

Score Bullets

000000 47





THE CENTIPEDE MYSTERY

DK'TRONICS MULTIPLE CHANGES

In the early days of the Spectrum, it was not uncommon for games to change their inlays over time. Usually starting off with a rough hand drawn cover, they moved to more appealing and professional designs as finances improved. The updated versions had better artwork, often moving from black and white to full colour, and have instructions printed on the reverse side. Many of the early companies did this including Mikro-Gen, Rabbit Software, Artic Computing and DK'Tronics. Mikro-Gen had line drawn, black and white inlays that later moved to full colour, and Rabbit swapped overall design to better reflect the game, and in one instance, to avoid any racial issues with a particular game.

It is much rarer however, to find a game to change and keep the original inlay. It is therefore even rarer to find a change of inlay and a change of game without any press release or news article. This though is what happened to the DK'Tronics game, Centipede.

Originally the game came with a nice, two colour cover in 1982. Other early releases also had this aesthetic, which looked really good. The game itself was written by David Heelas and is, as you will have guessed, a version of the arcade game. This was covered in my clone shoot-out in episode 54.

Sometime later, the exact date is unknown, the cover changed to this much nicer drawn one, along with other games from the same company. The name though remained the same, as did the game.

Then in 1983 the game name changed, at least on the inlay, to Centi-Bug. This may have been linked to copyright issues, but the inlay is identical apart from the name.

However inside, the game itself is still called Centipede, as can be seen in the loading screen and the game itself. It is though, a totally different version, this time written by Paul Johnson. Both games also have the same product code – DK04, seen on the spine of the inlay.

So what is going on?

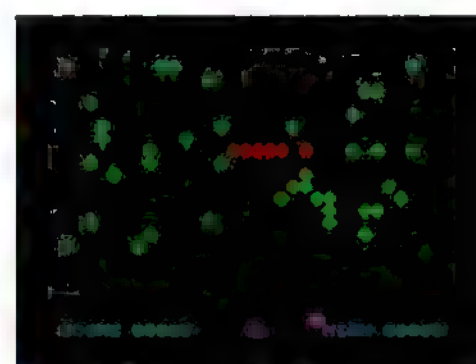
The answer is, I have no idea. I can't find any reference to the game change in any magazine news or articles. I can't see any reference to the new game by a new author, only the name change, and this just appeared on the adverts.

I can understand an inlay changing, but to change the name, inlay and game, but keep the new artwork and product code is a bit of a mystery.

For the record, the second game, Centi-Bug is the better of the two games, but because of this mix up, it did not appear in the clone shoot out.



Early monochrome inlays.



David Heelas version



Paul Johnson version

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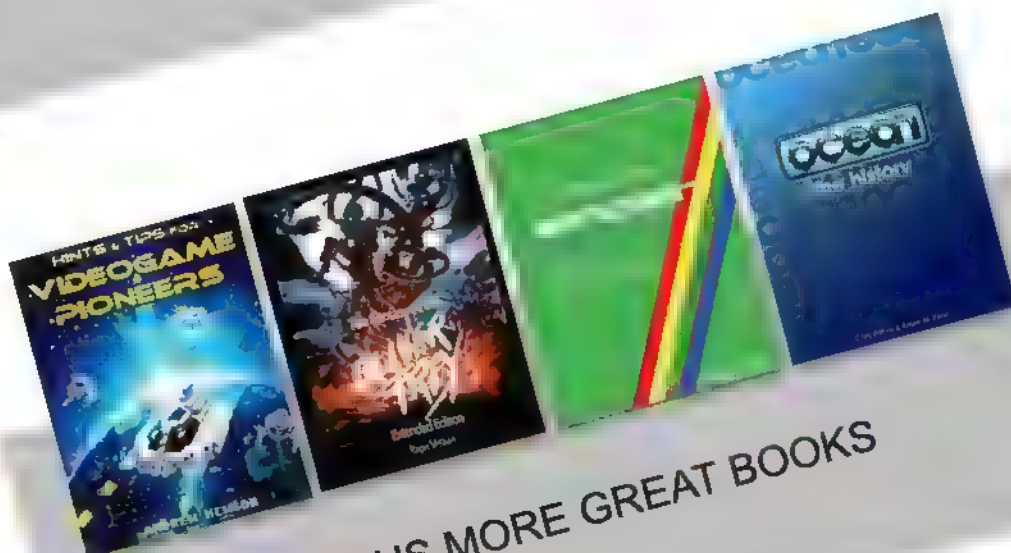
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GRUMPY OGRE'S

Adventure Page

Welcome back to strange places where your mind wanders freely and your brain shifts into a higher gear.

Adverts, adverts, adverts. Who wasn't taken in at some point by flashy adverts promising the gamer delights that the game just failed to deliver?

I was recently flicking through a copy of Computer & Video Games from 1983, and there are several of them, but this one caught my adventuring eye.



The first of the new exciting adventure games, specially commissioned by Kayde and written by a science fiction writer. The first game is set in and around a castle littered with monsters, mazes and magical items. You must find the correct items before facing Fordel, the elite Leopard Lord, because you won't get a second chance. Leopard Lord on the Swamp for just £9.95.

The game is Leopard Lord from Kayde Software. Reading the advert, you would be excused if you didn't have to run the toilet in excitement.

The first of the new exciting adventure games, specially commissioned by Kaye and written by a science fiction writer.

The first game is set in and around a castle littered with monsters, mazes and magical items. You must find the correct items before facing Fordel, the elite Leopard Lord, because you won't get a second chance.

Firstly, I am no spelling guru, but you don't spell elite like that! Looking on the game inlay, they got it right there, but on the full colour, full page advert nope!

Spelling is often a major flaw in adventure games, and I am as guilty as anyone. If you write these things, you get word-blindness when reading back your

own text, so misspelt words can creep in.

Having it on adverts though is a bit embarrassing, and doesn't give confidence in the company or game. Despite this, and based on the advert, I thought I would give it a try.

Once loaded, the game takes ages, presumably setting up all the arrays, data and random stuff. You are then asked if you want instructions and upon pressing Y are given a brief overview of the commands. These indicate the game has not been optimised, even to a basic level.

Items have to be entered in full, and not the usual first four letters. So for example an item named PADLOCK cannot be entered as PADL like most other games.

Even the instructions have errors, and words are joined together making the game look amateurish before it even begins. I get the feeling I am not going to enjoy this particular game.

THE PEOPLE OF OR YARM HAVE OFFERED YOU 1000 GOLD COINS IF YOU WILL RID THEM OF FORDEL THE EVIL WIZARD.

Once in, the locations are sparse to the point of dull, with a typical description of;

"In the centre of a gloomy forest path."

The commands have to be capitals too, which make it annoying, but once in CAPS mode, you just carry on.

You soon come to a hedgerow in which, if you SEARCH and not EXAMINE, can be found a blue key. You can get this using GET BLUE KEY, in full, and not the common GET KEY we are all familiar with.

Doing a quick INVENTORY and you discover you also have some other items you didn't even know you had.

A few moves later and you will be attacked by a leopard. Not the Lord we've

heard so much about sadly, otherwise that would be a very short game!

Getting rid of this beast is as easy as typing KILL LEOPARD. There seems to be nothing clever going on in the background like stats or health.

Eventually you will come to a foreboding building with a blue door. Very handy painting if the same colour as the key needed to open it!

Once inside you get several rooms and more objects including a book that when read will advertise the next game! Obviously a ploy stolen from Zork.

After further exploration you will be attacked by a snake and another leopard, find more objects, open a trapdoor and discover a secret tunnel near a statue. That all may sound riveting, but the game seems to lead you.

Each location provides the exits and anything you can interact with, so you know if you see a statue, you have to do something with it.

Just as I was warming to the game, I discovered a hole. Trying to GO DOWN, GO HOLE or just DOWN proved pointless, but entering CLIMB DOWN gave me this wonderful message, along with a STOP statement in BASIC!

THERE IS -
A STATUE
A HOLE
CLIMB DOWN
IT KILLS YOU
YOU HAVE FAILED. TRY AGAIN YOU
ARE OUR ONLY CHANCE

Now these types of death really do annoy me. There is no point at all in this without a warning. In hindsight, I did

have a rope with me at the time, but there was no suggestion it should be used.

At least I could have a poke about in the BASIC listing and find some nice, badly written messages like the one when you fail which reads:

"Now you realize that Fordel can summon a second demon with you beating heart."

Thought I would try an adventure I had never heard of before, just for the hell of it. The game I chose was Prehistoric Adventure by Crusader Computing. I chose it because I liked the sound of the title!

The game uses an odd font, that looks like it should be used in 42 column mode, but it is readable and the game progresses nicely to start with.

The puzzles seem logical at first, you find a shovel, sell it to a man who tells you shovels are in short supply, and then move around looking for the next puzzle. I am unsure if selling the shovel was the right decision, as I am not yet far enough in to tell. The reason I am not yet far enough in, is my pet hate; instant, un-warned death.

While walking around I chose one of the named exits only to find myself plummeting to my death. No warning, no second chance; dead.

I re-started and it isn't long before you find yourself in a maze. Really? Why do adventure writers think it is a good idea to add mazes.

Some mazes, the ones that offer easy exits and descriptive text to help you are OK, but the ones that say "you are in a field. Exits are in all directions." are plain stupid.

Yes, I know the original Colossal Cave had a maze of twisty passages!

Back to the game then, and having grabbed a few items I came across a forked stick. Picking it up and typing EXAMINE STICK prompted What? Stick

Entering EXAMINE FORKED STICK returns Too Many Words.

Annoying!

After a few attempts and a bit of random typing I found you could DIG. So I moved to every location and dug. I found absolutely nothing, so that was successful. I then thought what this forked stick was. A catapult perhaps, or maybe a divining rod.

Off I went again, divining every location until at last the stick pointed downward. Digging here (I tried before and found nothing) uncovered an object wrapped in cloth. Unwrapping this I discovered the map to the prehistoric island.

Now the old man at the start wanted this map, but upon returning, he told me I didn't have it. This was a bit confusing!

I continued on and yet again fell to my death without warning. I didn't want to spend all that time wondering around a maze, divining and digging again, so I had to concede that this particular game was not on my favourites list.

It needed warnings before death, it needed the ability to examine important objects and it needed more clues in the text.

Maybe this game was a little obscure and one you may not of heard of, but it falls into all the traps that bad games do. This makes me less likely to go back and have another go.

I later found out, via the wonders of the internet, that you need the shovel to dig, but the game allows you to sell it before using it; making the game unplayable.

It makes me grumpy!



You are in the centre of Stonehenge.
The only exit is west.

"Where is it then?" the old man scorns.
He directs you to the roadworks.
You are at the Roadworks.
Exits lead west, east.

look

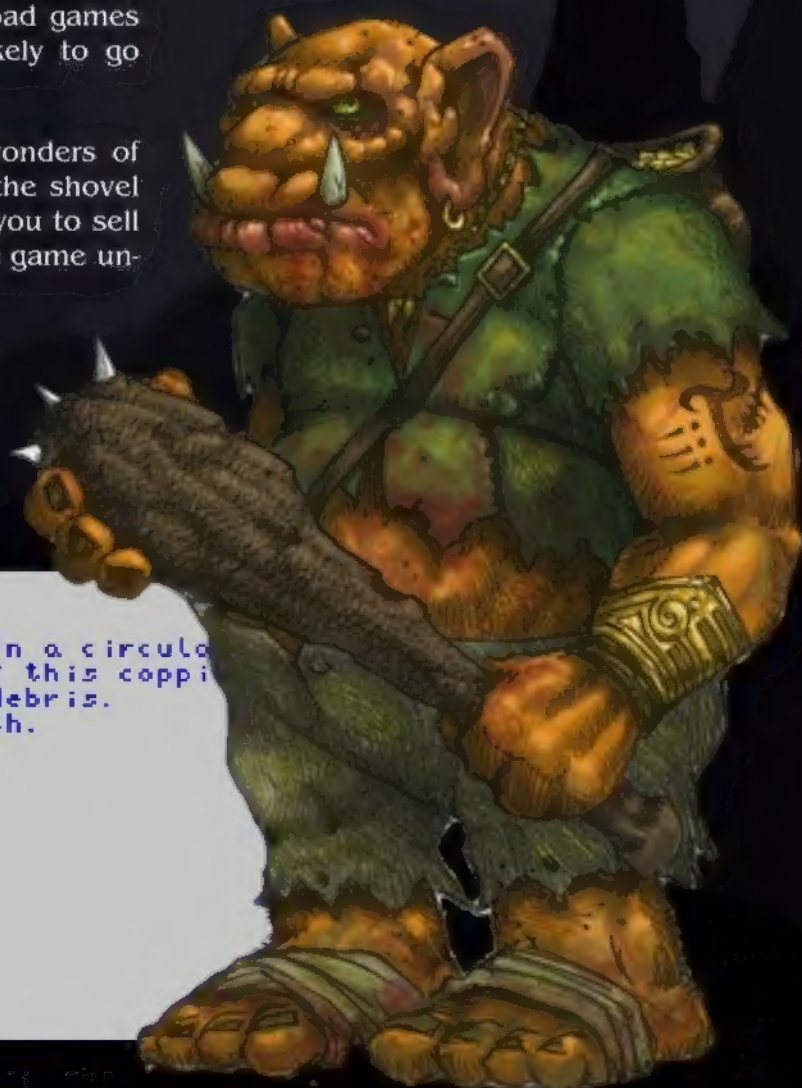
You are standing within a circle
of trees. The floor of this coppice
littered with wooden debris.
Exits lead south,north.

inv

You are carrying:
a forked stick
a bottle
a shovel

examine stick

what? stick



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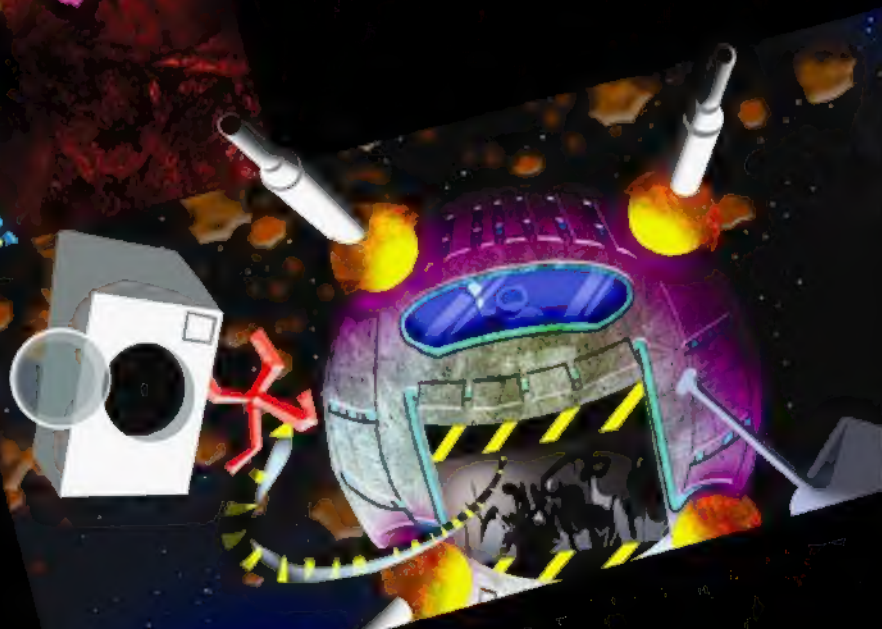
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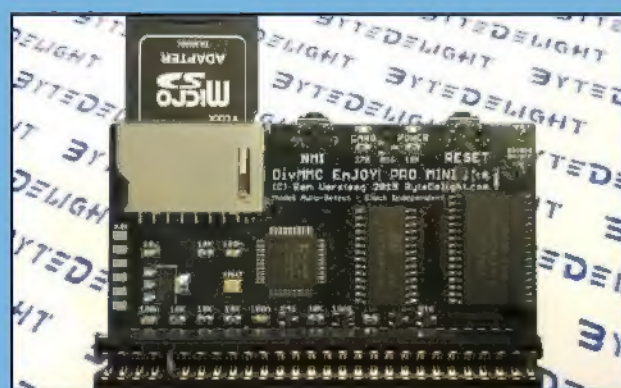
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